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# HORIZON

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*Vol. XI No. 65 May 1945*

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# COMMENT

‘OR l’heure actuelle comporte cette question capitale: l’Europe va-t-elle garder sa prééminence dans tous les genres?

‘L’Europe deviendra-t-elle ce qu’elle *est en réalité*, c’est-à-dire: un petit cap du continent asiatique? Ou bien l’Europe restera-t-elle *ce qu’elle paraît*, c’est-à-dire: la partie précieuse de l’univers terrestre, la perle de la sphère, le cerveau d’un vaste corps?’

VALÉRY: *La Crise de l’Esprit*. 1919.

IN this number certain literary information which we have been receiving about France has come to a head. It is not ‘a French number’—it would have to be double the size for that. It is more in the nature of an introduction to contemporary French literature. Thus Mr. A. J. Ayer’s three articles on Sartre’s philosophy and an article on Classicism in France by M. Thierry Maulnier have been held over for a month—so has a current reportage on Paris by Miss Nancy Cunard and a political report from Jacques Debû-Bridel, and several further articles on literature and painting, which will later appear. The vein is far too rich to be immediately exhausted.

There have been three ‘literatures’ in France since the war. (1) The literature of collaboration (Giono, Céline, Montherlant, Drieu, etc.), which we have omitted. (2) The literature of occupation—that is of those researches into the human spirit, the meaning of words, myths and symbols, the fate of man at a level sufficiently deep to evade the political censorship—such are the writings of Sartre, Camus, Paulhan, Ponge, Valéry, Blanchot, Brice-Parrain, Queneau, Michaux and most of the poetry of 1940–1944, and lastly the literature of resistance—literature of indignation and revolt which can only be published clandestinely and which has a political end in view—such are the brochures of the Editions de Minuit, *Lettres Françaises*, *l’Eternelle Revue* and the poems of Aragon, Emmanuel, Eluard.

In Paris now no one reads the collaborators. The literature of the occupation, however, is widely commented on and discussed, while the literature of the Resistance, which had of necessity been unduly inflated, is now finding its proper level. These distinctions are not absolute, for nearly all the ‘occupation’ writers were also in the resistance movement. One might say that Aragon and Eluard remain ‘Resistance’ writers, and continue to fight the battle



(which for them has become the policy of the Communist Party), so—but not as Communists—do Camus, Vercors and Debû-Bridel.

When I went to Paris in January, these groups were just beginning to confront each other. The heavy snow and the emptiness made the city resemble Vienna or Petrograd, it was so unlike the Paris of 1939, or the Paris of the Liberation, as to awaken no nostalgic memories or civic exaltation, and yet the visit made me indescribably happy. London seemed utterly remote—a grey, sick wilderness on another planet, for in Paris the civilian virtues triumph—personal relations, adult-minded seriousness, aliveness, love of the arts. Literature is enormously important there and one sees how pervasive, though impalpable, have become the irritable lassitude, brain-fatigue, apathy and humdrumness of English writers. At that time the presence of the Germans could still be felt; in the café chair where one sat they had sat not so long before. The three familiar waiters of the Flore (the same as in 1939) had tales to tell of them. There were even people who wanted them back. We were taken to see one of the worst of their torture chambers, the shooting gallery at Issy, a closed shed where not one survivor had been found to explain the meaning of the innumerable impressions of hands on the asbestos walls, or the huge furnace for blowing in hot air—only the bullet-torn posts at the end with their blood-stained rags attached to them told a clear story. The sensation of utter evil and misery which emanates from these human abattoirs—as from the dungeons of the Montjuig in Barcelona—still impresses on the visitor something of the ghastly atmosphere of occupied Paris—as do those streets, the Rue des Saussaies, Cherche-midi, Lauriston, where the Gestapo had headquarters.

It is by bearing such an impression in mind that one can best appreciate the literature of the Resistance, and the wonderful courage and resource of those who wrote, printed, and distributed its flaming broadsheets. Some of these are outstanding. There is Jean Tardieu's beautiful lament on Oradour which begins:

Oradour n'a plus de femmes  
Oradour n'a plus un homme  
Oradour n'a plus de feuilles  
Oradour n'a plus de pierres  
Oradour n'a plus d'église  
Oradour n'a plus d'enfants

Plus de fumée plus de rires  
plus de toits plus de greniers  
plus de meules plus d'amour  
plus de vin plus de chansons...

Then there are Cassou's sonnets written in prison at Toulouse (where Malraux was also interned and where his resistance manuscripts were destroyed). There are accounts of the horrible effects of imprisonment (Cévennes, *Dans la prison*, Minerrois, *Le temps mort*, an account by Claude Aveline of a woman's life in prison), and *La vie des Martyrs*, the appalling document issued by the doctors in the Resistance movement, 'pathologie des prisons allemandes en France', which gives a bald and scientific account of the commonest illnesses, disabilities mental and physical, and grave disorders which follow on imprisonment, starvation, and the various kinds of torture inflicted by the Gestapo and Vichy police on their victims.

The finest words on the movement, apart from the poems of Eluard and Aragon, are perhaps the conclusion of Paulhan's little essay, *L'Abeille*. 'When I was a child,' he writes, 'I was surprised, like all children, to find so many more deaths than births chronicled in the newspapers. (The explanation—which comes to one later—is obviously that it is rare, except for kings, to be very well known at birth, while for a famous man there is nothing left but to die.) I had also the feeling that all that was going to change, the world was for the new-born, and we would all die much less.

'It was an absurd sentiment yet I think a common one, and it renders more bitter the tragedy of an age when we learn every month of the death of a friend. One was in the Maquis, his body, already swollen, has been found in a field. Another wrote pamphlets, another delivered messages. They were riddled with bullets while they sang. Others before their death underwent tortures more horrible than the sufferings of cancer or lockjaw.

'And I know there are people who say they died for very little. A single piece of information (not always very accurate) wasn't worth that—nor a pamphlet, nor an underground newspaper even, not always very well edited. To those we must make reply: "It's because they were on the side of Life. It is because they loved things as insignificant as a song, a flip of the finger, a smile. You can squeeze a bee in your hand till it suffocates. You will be

stung before it smothers.” “It’s not much,” you may say. No, it isn’t much. But if it didn’t sting you, for a long time now there wouldn’t have been any more bees.’

★

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The triumph of the literary movement of the Resistance was in its refusal to hate. Of all anti-Fascist movements the French, I think, rose to the greatest height of humanism, as exemplified in the exquisite moderation of *Le Silence de la Mer*, or Eluard’s *Liberté*. Never have such warm and poetical lovers of life been so thoughtfully willing to throw it away. It is difficult for us in a country which has fought the Germans but not been occupied by them to appreciate the intolerable conditions under which the Resistance laboured. One must first of all imagine every petty restriction under which we have chafed; rationing, call-ups, identity cards, black-out offences, form-filling, etc., as being imposed not by our own Government but by our conquerors, with a curfew and a continuous parade of enemy uniforms thrown in. One must then add on four years of propaganda, propaganda diabolically directed against our weaker spots, our masochism, our childhood father fears—‘you have all been bad, bad, bad, you have been intolerably insolent, and now God has punished you, Hitler has punished you, Pétain, Laval and Darnan have punished you. You have hurt them all terribly. They were all so proud of you. So punishment. No more jam, butter, no picnics. Work! Work! Work! Work, Fatherland and Family! And if you all work very very hard you will be forgiven—because God, Hitler, Pétain, etc., are not really hard-hearted. They are pretty decent really—only you’ve hurt them so. Look how nice they are to the good children, to Bergéry, Morand, to your policeman, your mayor, the good people in the big house. And they know what’s best for you. In their will is your peace.’ Frenchmen have told me how utterly demoralizing was this continuous propaganda. As Eluard wrote of the traitors who made it:

Ils nous ont vanté nos bourreaux  
 Ils nous ont détaillé le mal  
 Ils n’ont rien dit innocemment

Floods of anonymous denunciations kept pouring in to the



Gestapo, all that is vilest in smug bourgeois middle-aged opportunism, fearful of discomfort or distress, went veering round to the Marshal, all that was lowest in angry boorish youth dressed up in the black uniforms, copied from the S.S., of the *Milices Populaires*. A friend of mine, one of the most kind and charming people that I know, described to me his feelings on going out into the woods of Cap d'Antibes where he was staying and discovering '*mort aux juifs*' plastered up on every tree. He said that it was like suddenly finding that one had a loathsome disease, that he learnt to shun his friends, never to speak to one unless they first spoke to him, that he divided them into those who cut him and those whose welcome was over-effusive, as if they were determined to show they were not afraid of infection. One day he woke up to find every single newspaper in the country carrying in huge headlines a denunciation of his family, which was held responsible for the war and for every evil consequence which his country was undergoing!

And having imagined all this treachery and corruption one must then try to imagine the life of those who fought against it. The betrayals, the tortures, the separations, the executions and suicides, the denunciations of the resisters by their own people who resented the harsher conditions which German retaliation imposed on them, the terrible uncertainties and disappointments which befall the weak who rise against the stronger. I wonder, for instance, if many people know that Inspecteur Boni, the chief of the French Gestapo torturers of the Rue de Lauriston, who was recently executed, specialized in impersonating British airmen. He would call at a farm in R.A.F. uniform, beg for shelter, and if favourably received, ask if he could hide his pocket transmitter in the barn. Then he would go off and return with the Gestapo. Such is the background against which the Resistance worked, and it is to be wondered that once they had learnt to watch their friends die in agony and to carry their own death with them in a capsule as their most precious possession, any of them could even contemplate literature, as an end in itself and not merely a means for bringing people back to the truth.

Eluard expresses this conflict in a recent poem *Critique de la Poésie*, where the deaths of Lorca, the old symbolist Saint-Pol-Roux, and the young Decour, founder of the *Editions de Minuit*, and the clandestine *Lettres Françaises* peal like a funeral bell through the lovely golden sensuality of his older image-glowing poetry.

B

## CRITIQUE DE LA POÉSIE

Le feu réveille la forêt  
 Les troncs les cœurs les mains les feuilles  
 Le bonheur en un seul bouquet  
 Confus léger fondant sucré  
 C'est toute une forêt d'amis  
 Qui s'assemble aux fontaines vertes  
 Du bon soleil du bois flambant

Garcia Lorca a été mis à mort

Maison d'une seule parole  
 Et des lèvres unies pour vivre  
 Un tout petit enfant sans larmes  
 Dans ses prunelles d'eau perdue  
 La lumière de l'avenir  
 Goutte à goutte elle comble l'homme  
 Jusqu'aux paupières transparentes

Saint-Pol-Roux a été mis à mort  
 Sa fille a été suppliciée

Ville glacée d'angles semblables  
 Où je rêve de fruits en fleur  
 Du ciel entier et de la terre  
 Comme à de vierges découvertes  
 Dans un jeu qui n'en finit pas  
 Pierres fanées murs sans écho  
 Je vous évite d'un sourire

Decour a été mis à mort.

The Resistance now belongs to the past, and is already becoming a legend. The Resisters, as Debû-Bridel, one of the foremost, will show in his article, are slowly losing their voice in the Government, and may or may not lose their influence with the people. The trials of collaborationist writers and editors, however, have taken the place of the Resistance as the second act in the public drama. They are No. 1 topic in Paris, and when I was there came before food (No. 2), fuel (No. 3), and Jean Genet's *Notre Dame des Fleurs* (a bad fourth). These trials arouse the most violent

controversy, which revolves round the sentence passed, and the culpability of the victims. The Right tend to deplore the death sentences, the Left to demand them. Mauriac, through his column in the *Figaro*, has consistently pleaded for their remission. From the psychological point of view there is something ambivalent in all discussions of collaborations, purges, etc., and however justified each individual sentence may be, one comes to feel that the rôle of the English—to whom these provocations have not applied—is to urge leniency. It is not that these writers are guiltless, but that it is doubtful if they are as guilty as many industrialists who have not been dealt with or as many informers who have escaped. The world is full of hate, and in France (a country which has had an undeclared civil war) it is seething. Those who have the right to hate and do not choose to exercise it can do enormous good. In the words of Audisio, written in a German prison, 'J'ai haï les Allemands de toute la force de mon être. Je veux que le témoignage sincère en demeure, et malgré moi s'il le faut... et si je pleure, Allemands, sachez-le bien, c'est que vous m'ayez amené jusque là et que je *veuille* le dire; c'est que vous ayez, dans la haine stérile, enfoncé des milliers et des milliers d'hommes de bonne volonté.'

Justice will be done to those who have betrayed, tortured, and informed against their fellows. We must try to mitigate against the operation of envy, revenge, intolerance and spite causing the death of those who have merely held the wrong opinions.

\* \* \*

Leaving honey-tongued Eluard, splenetic Aragon, and the politico-literary staff of *Lettres Françaises*, *Action*, *Liberté*, *Carrefour*, *Combat*, *Front National* and many other bellicose and brilliant newspapers to take care of the Resistance, let us explore some of the quieter corners of the battlefield.

We might do worse than pay a visit to the Café de Flore. This pleasant haunt has now become a kind of literary bourse. The brokers are the editors who sit round with their *sommaires* or contents-page of the new magazine they are going to bring out (when they can get the paper!), and these *sommaires*, which are handed round and discussed like a V-day menu, are the kerb-prices of literary reputations. Each *sommaire* contains the same names, and many of the writers are in attendance. That excitable



southern figure is Pierre Seghers, of Villeneuve-les-Avignon, whose magazine *Poésie* was the best of the Occupational monthlies, and famous for its equivocal anti-German and anti-Vichy contents. Seghers is the leader of a group of young poets, and one of the bravest of them. With him is André Fréneaud, a solid young Burgundian whose French has almost an English accent, and who was a prisoner of war, before joining the Resistance, and Loys Masson, one of the youngest and most gifted of the group. They are joined by Bertelé of *Confluences*, a magazine edited at Lyons and suppressed by Vichy, which has also published some interesting books. His *Sommaire* includes a new poem of Michaux and part of a long philosophical study of Baudelaire's dandyism which Sartre is preparing. Sartre is absent from his favourite table, though generally he remains there most of the day, but his friend Madame de Beauvoir (herself the author of a novel, *L'Invitée* about the whole ambience of the Flore) will show you his *sommaire* for the new magazine which he is going to edit and which will have a sociological and political as well as a literary character, like Macdonald's *Politics*. Koestler and Orwell are the writers about whom she asks for information. I have borrowed part of Sartre's opening article for HORIZON. It is only the first few pages of his long introductory essay on the main theme of the day, *La Littérature Engagée*, but I have included it to show one of the clearest and most forceful defences of the attitude to literature which is held by the Resistant Intellectuals. Sartre occupies a dominating position in the world of French literature today. He is to its prose what Eluard is to its poetry. It is a position which is criticized, for his philosophy is most obscure and there is something Central European about his pessimistic thought which antagonizes. But taken as a philosopher, a novelist, a dramatist and a critic, his bulk is enormous, and tends to obscure perhaps the younger and equally gifted Camus, also all of these four things and editor as well of the newspaper *Combat*. *Les Mouches* and *Huis-Clos* of Sartre, *L'Etranger* and *Caligula* of Camus (*Le Malentendu* is a little too much) are real literary achievements, fascinating to read, deeply original and stimulating.

At another table is Max-Pol Fouchet, the gay young inspirer of *Fontaine*, discussing his *sommaire* with Pierre Emmanuel. Like Sartre, a professor of philosophy, Emmanuel, who is a non-stop talker and arguer, commands several media, but unlike Sartre,

he is a strong Catholic and a great admirer of Jouve. They are joined by Jean Lescure, a saturnine and gifted poet who edits both the poetry on the French wireless and also an admirable magazine, *Messages*, which is the best of the poetry productions, though lacking the important *chronique* aspect of the monthly *Poésies*. At another table is Thierry Maulnier, whose quarterly *La Table Ronde* is a model of expensive printing, and rivals the magnificent *Arbalète*, which is edited, printed and published by one man, Marc Barbezat of Lyons. *La Table Ronde* includes some of the last writings and drawings of Max Jacob, whose terrible death in a concentration camp, wearing the Jew's yellow star, shocked the whole civilized world. It also includes a very long poem by Cocteau, *Léone*, whose verse the Master describes as 'marchant à pneu crêvé', like a car on three wheels. It is a strange limping somnambulant poem in which all the imagery from his other works parades past him in a waking dream, with Léone elusively personifying his muse. Cocteau you will not see at the Flore, but that smiling and somewhat rough-looking character is Jean Genet, whom Cocteau befriended, and who is the author of the extraordinary *Notre Dame des Fleurs*, part of which is published in the eighth number of the *Arbalète*. Jean Genet, who has been in and out of prison most of his life, has managed to produce a novel which makes *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, *Tropic of Cancer* and all stories of the *milieu* and the underworld read like *Peg's Paper*. It is a passionate, lyrical and criminal book, and reminds one of those photos of murderers with a huge *fatalitas* tattooed across their chest. It is the last word in the poetry of homosexual-anti-social outlaws, because the society against which Jenet rebels is an unhealthy one, and because he happens to be born a poet.

But now it is time to leave the Flore, to pay for our *jus de raisin*, *viandox*, or beer. There are still several *sommaires* we haven't seen—the charming anthologist's Parisot, with his new magazines *Quatre Vents* and his *Vrilles*—and still several more writers we would like to meet; the fantastical poet Prévert, 'ah, il est marron, lui', and the more sombre Georges Bataille, the post-Nietzschean essayist and one-time *éditeur* of the extraordinary *Acéphale*. And it would not be a long walk to call on Picasso in that high studio where the world's last great alchemist turns our dross into gold, or to visit the apartment where his friend Henri Michaux, a somewhat sadistic magician, applies his verbal technique to a general

Chinese slicing operation on the bourgeois personality. Or, to linger in the sacred rue de l'Odeon, where those two bi-lingual sirens who have so long enchanted us with all that is best in two literatures, Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier, still decoy. But time is short, we have a last date with Gallimard, in his magnificent new office, once Talleyrand's hotel. Here is one more group of non-political literary explorers, who have come to visit Paulhan (he has a *sommaire*, too, for he is soon to get back the *N.R.F.*). Paulhan, like Eluard, Sartre and Michaux, is another prince in the world of letters, an impassioned critic of poetry and painting whose quiet high voice, like Lytton Strachey's, can strike terror, especially when it strikes at terrorists. (His *Fleur de Tarbes, ou la Terreur dans les Lettres*, is a brilliant attack on the Puritans and anti-literary philosophical pedants who would banish from literature the graces which they neither possess nor comprehend.) Paulhan, a pillar of the Resistance Movement, is deploring the bad effects on literature of coming into the open again. Art benefits by being clandestine and subversive, he is saying; all writers write best under another name. With him is Francis Ponge, the creator of an extraordinary kind of prose poem, both lyrical and scientific in its approach, which results in a three-dimensional picture of his usually very tangible subject. Pebbles, insects, bits of bread are his specialities. He is, in fact, a word painter of verbal still lives who has been through cubism, a prose Braque. They are joined by Raymond Queneau, also of the *N.R.F.*, a vigorous and many-sided satirist, novelist, poet who, besides editing a new edition of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and thus lighting the only candle in Paris to the greatest of provincials, contributes poems of a strange verbal dexterity to *Messages*. His *Trains dans la Banlieue Ouest* is a *tour de force* like MacNeice's *Bagpipes*:

Nanterre et Rueil qui donc arrueille  
 Qui donc arrueille les roseaux  
 qui donc enterre qui donc anteille  
 larmes mucus odeurs et os

Suresne' Asnière' on va-t-et-vient  
 le long du fleuve aux bois méandres  
 trainent les pierres trissent les chiens  
 sur des sentiers à la chair tendre...



It is a pleasure to talk to the husky Queneau and to discuss his fascinating and destructive *Exercices de style*—for he speaks English well and the others merely read it. But we are now quite tired out and must trudge through the blue snow to the Métro, laden with the presentation copies which have helped to produce this Number and which the English customs officers at Newhaven will thumb and snivel over like dogs growling round a stale herring. 'This is a *funny* kind of a book—Pie-kasso—do you mind just coming with me?' and then in an awestruck whisper to his superior: 'It's his book, sir, kind of *funny* if you see'.

\* \* \*

And still I have mentioned only a fraction of the literary world of Paris. I would like to be able to analyse the exhilaration which for eight weeks after leaving Paris I continued to feel, and the absence of which I now deplore. It was partly a sense of liberation, of getting out of the exhausted London atmosphere into a country where the war was felt to be over, and where individuals were their natural size, neither inflated with office nor shrunk with worry. It was partly returning to a world of ideas. For the English literary world is not a world of ideas but of personalities, a world of clubs and honours and ancestor-worship and engagement-books, where a writer one wants to meet has to be hunted for several weeks until he is finally corralled at bay under some formidable mantelpiece. But French writers are not pompous, in everything but ideas they travel light; intelligence flows through them like a fast river and is not always being silted up by accretions of the personality, by sales, honours, habits, social and official positions. And they have no B.B.C. On the whole the present literary world of Paris is young and poor, and its experiences in the Resistance have made it both generous and brave. I think if I were to sum up its message in the way in which nearly every English visitor has felt it, it would be something like this: 'Don't worry. It's all all right. Everything you love is still here. The ideas, buildings, books, and pictures, the wine, the people, the trees. And they won't run away. Art and life are beginning again. The European orchestra is tuning up, and its members are as pleased to see us as we are to be with them; the freemasonry of the intellect is at work and a new humanism is being born. For what our world now most needs is a positive and

adult humanism. America could give it, but she is too money-bound and machine-dry, Russia lacks the sentiment of individual liberty, England is too bureaucratized and war-weary. We have added the adjective 'bloody-minded' to our language, and must rest our laurels on that. But France has known the tyrant, and been set free before the knowledge destroyed her. France alone, if she can survive an acute attack of nationalism, is capable of a bloodless 1789, of a new proclamation to the world of the old truths that life is meant to be lived and that liberty is its natural temperature, that brains are to be used and beauty to be worshipped, and that human beings (the only animals who can laugh) are intended to be happy.

For this number Valéry has given us a fragment of his new Faust, and Ponge an unpublished still-life. Sartre defends *la littérature engagée* in a passage which will soon introduce his new magazine and John Russell discusses the dramatical works of Sartre and Camus, and Spender some of the new poetry, Toynbee examines *la littérature non-engagée*, Valéry the great, Michaux, Blanchot, Queneau, while Paulhan's *Braque* illustrates his elusive Forster-like style. France has at present no art critics and the work is being done by poets who are, alas! quite ignorant of the correct pretentious jargon. We shall have to lend her some.

Later in the year HORIZON hopes to publish in small limited editions in French recent works of Sartre, Michaux, Paulhan, Ponge, Camus. Readers are also recommended to visit at once the exhibition of French books at the National Gallery, where they can see Picasso's splendid *Buffon* and others of the lovely illustrated books which were part of the French spiritual defiance of the Germans.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

# THE CASE FOR RESPONSIBLE LITERATURE

ALL writers of bourgeois origin have known the temptation of irresponsibility: for a century this has been traditional in a literary career. An author seldom establishes any connection between his works and their cash returns. On the one hand, he writes, sings and laments: on the other, he is given money. These are two apparently unrelated facts; the best he can say for himself is that he is being given a pension for lamenting. He feels himself to be in the position of a student with a scholarship rather than in that of the worker who receives the price of his labour. The theorists of Art-for-Art and Realism have helped to confirm him in this opinion. Has it been noticed that they have the same object and the same origin? The principal aim of the author who follows the precepts of the former is to produce works which are of no use: they seem beautiful to him almost by virtue of their complete gratuitousness and lack of foundation. Thus, he places himself on the fringe of society, or, rather, consents to figure in it exclusively as a consumer: exactly like the scholarship student. The realist is also a willing consumer. As for production, that is a different matter: he has been told that science is not concerned with utility, and he aspires to the sterile impartiality of the scientist. We have been told often enough that he 'leans over' the class of society which he wishes to describe. He leans over? Where is he then? In mid-air? The truth is that, uncertain of his social position, too timorous to revolt against the bourgeoisie which pays him, too lucid to accept it unreservedly, he chooses to pass judgement on his time, and so is persuaded that he remains outside it, as an experimenter remains outside an experimental system. Thus the disinterestedness of science converges with the wantonness of Art-for-Art. It is not by chance that Flaubert is at the same time a pure stylist, a whole-hearted lover of form, and the father of naturalism; it is not by chance that the Goncourts prided themselves both on their powers of observation and on the artistry of their writing.

This heritage of irresponsibility has sown confusion into the

minds of many writers. They suffer from an uneasy literary conscience, and no longer quite know whether it is laudable or grotesque to write. Formerly, the poet thought of himself as a prophet, and that was respectable; later, he became an accursed pariah, and that was still endurable. But today he has fallen from the ranks of the specialists, and it is not without a certain uneasiness that he writes 'profession—man of letters' after his name in hotel registers. Man of letters: the combination of words is in itself enough to discourage one from writing: it brings to mind an Ariel, a Vestal, an *enfant terrible*, or an inoffensive maniac comparable to an exercise fiend or a numismatist. All this is rather ridiculous. The man of letters writes while others are fighting: one day he may be proud of the fact, feeling himself to be the recorder and guardian of ideal values; the next day he may be ashamed, finding that literature resembles a kind of special affectation. With the bourgeois, who read him, he is conscious of his dignity, but when confronted with the workers, who do not read him, he suffers from an inferiority complex, as we saw at the Maison de la Culture in '36. This complex is certainly at the root of what Paulhan calls *terrorisme*, and it led the Surrealists to despise the literature which had called them into being. After the last war a peculiar lyricism appeared; the best and purest writers publicly confessed that which could most humiliate them, and expressed satisfaction when they had brought on themselves the opprobrium of the bourgeoisie: they had produced writings which, in their consequences, somewhat resembled action. These isolated attempts did not prevent words from depreciating more every day. There followed a crisis in rhetoric, then a crisis in language. At the eve of this war, the majority of literary men were content to be nothing but nightingales. Eventually, some writers appeared who carried this aversion from production to the extreme: outdoing their predecessors, they considered that they would not be doing enough by publishing a book which was merely useless; they maintained that the secret aim of all literature was the destruction of language, and that to attain this end it sufficed to speak without saying anything at all. This inexhaustible silence was fashionable for some time, and the Messageries Hachette distributed to railway bookstalls manuals of Silence in the guise of voluminous novels. Today, things have come to such a pass that there are writers who, when reviled or punished for having hired out their talents to the

Germans, have been known to register grieved astonishment. 'Why,' they say, 'is one responsible for what one writes?'

We do not want to be ashamed of writing, and we have no desire to speak without saying anything. Let us hope—for ourselves, at any rate—that we will never reach that stage: for no one can reach it. All that is written has a meaning, even if the meaning is far from that which the author wished to imply. For us, the writer is neither a Vestal nor an Ariel: he is 'in it up to the neck', whatever he writes, branded, committed, even in the most distant withdrawal. If at certain times he uses his art to fabricate knick-knacks of sonorous nonsense, even that is a sign: it means that there is a crisis in literature and, hence, in society, or else it means that the ruling classes have goaded him into frivolous activities without his knowledge, for fear lest he should escape to swell the ranks of the revolutionaries. Flaubert, who railed so bitterly against the bourgeoisie, and who imagined that he had withdrawn completely from the social machine—what is he to us but a talented property-owner? And does not the meticulous art of Croisset suggest his comfort, the solicitude of a mother or a niece, a well-ordered existence, a prosperous business and cheques regularly drawn? It requires but a few years for a book to become a social fact which is consulted as an institution and which is admitted as a matter for statistics; only a short while needs to elapse before it merges with the furnishings of a period, with its clothes, its hats, its means of transport and its food. The historian will say of us: 'They ate this, they read that, they dressed thus.' The first railway, the cholera, the revolt of the Canuts, Balzac's novels, and the rapid progress of industry rank equally in characterizing the July Monarchy. All this has been repeated again and again since Hegel: we want to draw practical conclusions from the statement. Since the writer has no possible means of escape, we wish him to cover his epoch exclusively; it is his only chance; his time is made for him, and he is made for it. Balzac's indifference in the days of '48 and Flaubert's frightened incomprehension of the Commune are to be regretted; regretted *for the writers' own sakes*: for there lies something which they have missed for ever. We want to miss nothing in our time: there may be other epochs more beautiful, but this is ours; we have only *this* life to live, in the midst of *this* war, perhaps, of *this* revolution. It must not be concluded from this that we are preaching a kind of populism:



quite the contrary. Populism is a child of old parents, the wretched offspring of the last realists: it is yet another attempt to sneak away from the mess. We are convinced, on the contrary, that one *cannot* sneak away. Were we dumb and immobile as stones, our very passivity would be an action. The abstention of one who devotes his life to writing novels about the Hittites entails taking up some kind of attitude. The writer is situated in his time: each word has its reverberations, each silence too. I hold Flaubert and Goncourt responsible for the repressions which followed the Commune, because they wrote not a single line to prevent them. It may be said that it was none of their business: but was the case of Calas the business of Voltaire? the sentence on Dreyfus the business of Zola? the administration of the Congo the business of Gide? Each one of these writers, in some particular circumstance of his life, weighed up his responsibility as a writer. The occupation has taught us ours. Since by our very existence we influence our time, we must decide that this influence shall be deliberate. Again we must specify: it is not unusual for a writer to concern himself, in his own small way, with shaping the future. But that is a vague, conceptual future, embracing the whole of humanity and on which no definite light can be cast: will history come to an end? will the sun be extinguished? what will be the condition of man under the socialist regime of the year 3000? We leave these dreams to the anticipatory novelists: it is the future of *our* epoch which should be the object of our concern: a limited future, which can hardly be distinguished from the present—for an epoch, like a man, is primarily a future. It is formed by its current toils, by its undertakings, by its more or less long-term projects, by its rebellions, by its struggles, by its hopes: when will the war end? how will the country be re-equipped? how will international relations be planned? what will be the social reforms? will the forces of reaction triumph? will there be a revolution, and what form will it take? This is the future we choose for ourselves, and we desire no other. Nevertheless, some writers have less immediate aims and take a longer view. As they pass amongst us, they seem to be far away. Where are they, then? With their great-nephews, they turn to look at the vanished era which was ours and of which they are the sole survivors. But they err in their calculations: posthumous glory is always based on misunderstanding. What do they know of those nephews who are to come and pick them

out from amongst us? Immortality is a dreadful alibi: it is not easy to live with one foot beyond and one foot before the grave. How can current affairs be disposed when viewed from such a distance? How can one stir oneself to battle, how can one rejoice in victory? All values are equalized. They gaze unseeingly at us: we are already dead in their eyes; so they return to the novel which they are writing for men whom they will never see. They have allowed their lives to be stolen from them by immortality. We write for our contemporaries, we do not wish to view our world with eyes of the future—for that would be the surest method of destroying it—but with our fleshy eyes, with our real, mortal eyes. We do not wish to win our case by appeal, and we have no use for a posthumous rehabilitation: it is here and in our lifetime that cases are won or lost.

Yet we do not seek to establish a literary relativism. We have little liking for pure history. And besides, does pure history exist outside the manuals of M. Seignobos? Every epoch discovers an aspect of the condition of humanity, in every epoch man chooses for himself with regard to others, to love, to death, to the world; and when a controversy arises on the subject of the disarmament of the F.F.I. or of the aid to be given to the Spanish Republicans, it is that metaphysical choice, that personal and absolute decision which is in question. Thus, by becoming a part of the uniqueness of our time, we finally merge with the eternal, and it is our task as writers to cast light on the eternal values which are involved in these social and political disputes. Yet we are not concerned with seeking these values in an intelligible paradise: for they are only interesting in their immediate form. Far from being relativists, we assert emphatically that man is absolute. But he is absolute in his own time, in his own environment, on his own earth. The absolute which a thousand years of history cannot destroy is *this* irreplaceable, incomparable decision, which he makes at *this* moment, in *these* circumstances; the absolute is Descartes, the man who escapes us because he is dead, who lived in his time, who thought in his time from day to day, with limited data, who formed his doctrine in accordance with a certain stage reached in science, who knew Gassendi, Caterus and Mersenne, who in his childhood loved a shady young woman, who was a soldier and got a servant girl with child, who attacked not the principle of authority in general but the authority of Aristotle in particular, and

who rises out of his time, disarmed but unconquered, like a landmark; and the relative is cartesianism, that coster's barrow philosophy, which is trotted out century after century after century, in which everyone finds whatever he has put in. It is not by chasing after immortality that we will make ourselves eternal: we will not make ourselves absolute by reflecting in our works desiccated principles which are sufficiently empty and negative to pass from one century to another, but by fighting passionately in our time, by loving it passionately, and by consenting to perish entirely with it.

[Translated by NATALIA GALITZINE]

PAUL VALÉRY  
MY FAUST  
THE CRYSTAL GIRL

Act II. Scene V.

JOY. FAUST (*He comes from the garden, holding a rose*)

FAUST: Here I am . . . Look, here's a rose for you. But, quickly, get something to write with . . . I'm going to dictate here . . . I am overflowing with ideas.

JOY: Thank you, Doctor! How intensely fresh it is! I'd like to shut my eyes and spend my life draining it of all the intoxicating fragrance it has to give . . . Ah! how strong and sweet it is!

FAUST: Quite . . . But ideas won't wait. Are you ready? Put the flower down.

JOY: I've got everything necessary—paper, pencils . . . (*She puts the flower in her breast*).

FAUST: Now then. I shall dictate as it comes. It is not ideas that are the trouble . . . but the form. Still, one must get them down . . .

JOY: I'm ready, Doctor.

FAUST: Good . . . Good . . . But now I'm not—I've lost the thread. (*A pause.*) It's a heavenly evening . . . (*Joy writes*).

JOY (*reading back*): 'It's a heavenly . . .'

FAUST: No, no . . . I'm not dictating . . . I am just existing. It is a heavenly evening. Too fine, too mild, too lovely, even . . . There is a tenderness about the earth . . .

JOY: Shall I stay? Do you wish to be alone?

FAUST: No . . . It is too much for one person. Sit down there . . . You must stay . . . You must enjoy with me, and like me, the fresh smell of the watered earth and those precious essences which the last hours of this day are distilling from all my flowers. Perfumes seem to me to be promises. Pure promises, and nothing else. For there is nothing more exquisite than promise . . . nothing else at all.

JOY: Do you really not want to work?

FAUST: We'll work later on. There's wisdom in letting the reward come first. This moment is so precious . . . It permeates me like those chords in music which carry hearing beyond the hearer's desire, which melt and resolve one's whole being into that strange and blissful fusion from which its strength and weakness spring. . . . Everything around us is singing. The loveliest part of the day is singing before it dies.

JOY (*con amore*): But it is you who are singing, Doctor . . . You look like a god this evening . . . You are more than alive . . . It is as if you yourself were one of those mysterious moments that are charged with all those powers that keep death at bay. At this moment, your face is the most beautiful of your faces. All that is noblest and most spiritual in you lies open there for the deep glow of sunset to illuminate. No, I have never seen you till now, because I have never before seen you at once so proud and gentle and that look in your eyes which sees more than there is to see . . . Are you . . . you are not going to die, are you? Your eyes seem to be contemplating the universe in the image of this little garden, just as a little pebble, picked up by a learned man, will speak to him from the hollow of his hand about some period in the world's history.

FAUST: The universe is no concern of mine, nor am I thinking of anything.

JOY: How do you know?

FAUST: I tell you I'm not thinking of anything . . . Yet some decision has got to be made here; and I know this precisely just because I am not thinking of anything.

JOY: What, though?

FAUST: Something. And perhaps . . . something else. But my body is unaware as yet; and my mind tells me nothing. There is only the incantation of the moment; the fullness of evening.

JOY: Strange . . . I'm not thinking of anything, either.

FAUST: It's too perfect an evening. There's nothing else to consider. How old are you?

JOY: I might have been married five years ago.

FAUST: I might have been dead long ago—long, long ago . . . I was young once, Joy.

JOY: But never, I am sure, were you more beautiful.

FAUST: I was young, Joy. I was old. And then, I was young again. I have roamed more than one world . . . But I weighed up desire and experience in solitude.

JOY: In the desert?

FAUST: Why so? Solitude is something one creates everywhere.

JOY: And . . . now?

FAUST: I have weighed up everything. The total weight adds up to nothing. I have done good. I have done evil. I have seen good come out of evil. Evil from good.

JOY: In fact, the full circle?

FAUST: Yes.

JOY: And . . . now?

FAUST: And now I am what I am and am not, I believe, anything but this. What hopes and despairs, triumphs and disasters there had to be in order that I should achieve this . . . But here I am . . . if my mind had been a little more willing, mind alone would have achieved it for me. . . .

JOY: Doctor, I don't understand all you're saying. You are talking to yourself; you aren't talking to me. But there is no need for me to understand. I cannot follow an argument this evening. It is your voice, though, that leads me on like music. It transports me . . . to the verge of tears . . . Oh! Go on, tell me whatever you want to. You hurt me, almost . . . I feel like fainting from feeling so well. I am too happy, and yet I'm suffocating. I cannot find words, or any way, to ease my heart of this surfeit . . . of myself. Oh! And to add to it all, the screaming of those horrible birds, far up in the sky, cutting across my happiness.

FAUST (*to himself*): Is this perhaps the culmination of my art? I am living. And only living. There lies the achievement . . . Now at last I that was have ended by making me what I am. This is now my sole significance. Here and now I am the present itself. A true marriage of self and presence, a perfect interchange with no matter what may come. No remainder. No longer any mystery. Now the infinite is definite. The non-existent has ceased to exist. If consciousness is what the mind must produce in order that what IS may BE—then I, FAUST, am now pure and perfect consciousness. Fullness. Fulfilment. I am what I am. This is the culmination of my art, the classic age of the art of existence. This is my achievement: To be living. Is this not everything? Yet there must be awareness of the fact . . . There is no question of reaching this high upland of existence without such awareness. How many adventures, arguments, dreams and errors there needs must be in order to gain the freedom to be what one is—and nothing but what one is! What is perfection but the suppression of what we lack? Deficiency is always superfluous . . . But, at present, it is clear to me that the slightest glance, the slightest sensation, the least of life's acts and functions, have become the equivalents of the propositions and inner promptings of my mind . . . This is the supreme condition in which everything is summed up in living, wherein, at a smile from me, all questions and answers are rejected . . . TO LIVE . . . My masterpiece is to breathe and feel. I am born each moment for each moment. TO LIVE . . . I BREATHE. What else is there? I BREATHE . . . And every breath I take is always the first, each one expands anew those inner wings which beat true time. They bear the one that is from the one that was to the one that is to be . . . I AM. An extraordinary thing, surely! To be suspended above death as a stone might hang in space. It is incredible . . . I BREATHE, nothing more. The heavy scent of my flowers impels me to breathe, and I feel the smell of the fresh earth, increasingly desired, increasingly desirable, affecting my powers of breathing. I BREATHE, no more, for there is nothing more. I BREATHE and I SEE. It is sweet to look upon this place . . . Yet what does this place matter? What does it matter

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what one sees? It is enough to SEE, and to know that one sees . . . It is a whole science in itself. I see that pine tree. What does the pine itself matter? It might just as well be an oak tree. I should see it. And that roof of shining slate could as well be a mirror of still water. I should see it. And as for the irregular line of those distant hills which enclose the landscape, I feel in my hands the power to redraw as I please its long, flexible contour . . . TO SEE, then, is to see as well one thing as another; to see what is to see what may be . . .

JOY (*aside, and approaching him cautiously from behind as if moved by an irresistible force*): I cannot stand so far away. It would be like standing away from myself . . . What would he say if I were to kiss his hand? What would he do?

FAUST (*to himself*): I BREATHE and I SEE . . . Yet what is perhaps more present in presence is this: I TOUCH . . . (*he strikes the arm of the bench on which he is sitting*). And at one stroke I discover and create what is real . . . My hand, though, in touching feels itself touched. That is what real means. Nothing more.

JOY (*behind him, under her breath*): He is talking and I am talking to myself; but we are not exchanging words at all. And yet it is impossible that there should not be in what he is feeling and in what I myself feel a . . . a living likeness. The present moment is too pregnant, too heavy with the ripe fruit of a wonderful day, for two people, even as different as we are, not to feel themselves similarly at the end of their resistance to the pressure of events . . . Similarly overlaid and satiated as we both are, and as it were charged with an almost intolerable force of happiness that cannot release itself, or find its natural outlet, expression or end . . . A kind of death . . .

FAUST (*aside*): Yes. What is there more real? I touch. I am touched. An old author said: To touch and to be touched is the property of bodies alone . . . (*A silence. Joy has placed her hand gently on his shoulder.*) Someone is touching me . . . Who? (*With emotion*) Dear Joy, is it you? . . . I thought you'd gone . . .

JOY: Yes, it's me . . . Why do you call me *dear* in that way?

FAUST: Because you touched me . . . Ah! my dear, why did you touch me?

JOY: I was afraid you might fall asleep while dreaming . . .  
It's unwise, you know. . . .

FAUST: I have nothing to fear from one more sunset . . . Leave  
your hand there.

JOY: No. Why should I leave it?

FAUST: Because there's no longer any reason. Take it away.

JOY: No.

FAUST: Why?

JOY: Since it found its way there of its own accord . . . In point of  
fact, I don't know why it did, or why it should stay there on  
your shoulder, or why it should remove itself. Why? It's  
easy to say that. Do you yourself know, for all your learning,  
why you called me DEAR a moment ago? These things  
just happen of their own accord, like everything very  
important. (*She takes her hand away.*)

FAUST: So this is something born of you and me—not of you  
or me. Together, your hand and that word have created  
something—a kind of being. We know no more about it  
than those who make a child know what it is they're making.  
Intimacy is sometimes born of nothing, of a distraction, of  
an error shared . . . And sometimes this nothing returns to  
nothing again; sometimes it involves everything . . . (*Formally*) Kindly take your hand away.

JOY: But, Doctor. I have taken it away.

FAUST: I seemed to feel it still pressing lightly on my shoulder  
. . . But let me have it now . . . I need it. I need it. There  
is something too pleasant in this weariness I feel to let me  
get up. (*She gives him her hand. He moves as if to pull Joy  
down on top of him; but all at once repels and drops the hand he  
was holding.*) No . . . there's no point in it . . . Thank you.  
Don't help me. If you were to give it to me . . .

JOY: Yes?

FAUST (*rising*): Everything else would follow.

JOY (*hanging her head, and in a trembling voice*): You're going in?

FAUST: Not yet. I feel like doing a little more work out here.  
We've still got a short hour of daylight left. You'd think  
it was sorry to be leaving us. But we're not getting on at  
all with our work. Would you mind taking your notebook?

[Translated from the French by JOHN HAYWARD]

FRANCIS PONGE

## LA POMME DE TERRE

PELER une pomme de terre bouillie de bonne qualité est un plaisir de choix.

Entre le gras du pouce et la pointe du couteau tenue par les autres doigts de la même main, l'on saisit—après l'avoir incisé—par l'une de ses lèvres ce rêche et fin papier que l'on tire à soi pour le détacher de la chair appétissante du tubercule.

L'opération facile laisse, quand on a réussi à la parfaire sans s'y reprendre à trop de fois, une impression de satisfaction indicible.

Le léger bruit que font les tissus en se décollant est doux à l'oreille, et la découverte de la pulpe comestible réjouissante.

Il semble, à reconnaître la perfection du fruit nu, sa différence, sa ressemblance, sa surprise—et la facilité de l'opération—que l'on ait accompli là quelque chose de juste, dès longtemps prévu et souhaité par la nature, que l'on a eu toutefois le mérite d'exaucer.

C'est pourquoi je n'en dirai pas plus, au risque de sembler me satisfaire d'un ouvrage trop simple. Il ne me fallait—en quelques phrases sans effort—que déshabiller mon sujet, en en contournant strictement la forme: la laissant intacte mais seulement plus polie, brillante et toute prête à subir comme à procurer les délices de sa consommation.

★ ★ ★

... Cet apprivoisement de la pomme de terre par son traitement à l'eau bouillante durant vingt minutes, c'est assez curieux (mais justement tandis que j'écris des pommes de terre cuisent—il est une heure du matin—sur le fourneau devant moi).

Il vaut mieux, m'a-t-on dit, que l'eau soit salée, sévère: pas obligatoire mais c'est mieux.

Une sorte de vacarme se fait entendre, celui des bouillons de l'eau. Elle est en colère, au moins au comble de l'inquiétude. Elle se déperd furieusement en vapeurs, verse, grille aussitôt, bave, pfutte, tsitte: enfin, très agitée sur ces charbons ardents.

Mes pommes de terre, plongées là-dedans, sont secouées de soubresauts, bousculées, injuriées, imprégnées jusqu'à la moelle.

Sans doute la colère de l'eau n'est-elle pas à leur propos, mais elles en supportent l'effet—et ne pouvant s'échapper de ce milieu,

s'en trouvent profondément modifiées (j'allais écrire s'entrouvrent . . .).

Finalement, elles y sont laissées pour mortes, ou du moins très fatiguées. Si leur forme en réchappe (ce qui n'est pas toujours), elles sont devenues molles, dociles. Toute acidité a disparu de leur pulpe: on leur trouve bon goût.

Leur épiderme s'est aussi rapidement différencié: il faut l'ôter (il n'est plus bon à rien), et le jeter aux ordures. . . .

Reste ce bloc friable et savoureux—qui prête moins qu'à d'abord vivre ensuite à philosopher.

JOHN RUSSELL

## THE EXISTENTIAL THEATRE

FIRST reports from liberated France combined to suggest that the continuing vitality and thrust of French writing had been nowhere more evident than in the theatre. This was not surprising; for in contrast to the glaze of apathy or frustration through which English writers in our time have mostly regarded it, the theatre has been for French writers a continuous stimulant and testing playmate. The theatre can give an irresistible, indeed often an unforeseen momentum to ideas; and the recent success of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis-Clos* should be considered, not as a solitary plume of light amid encircling darkness, but as the latest of those dazzling flares of research and experiment by which French writing has been lit since the first days of the Théâtre Antoine. The theatre has enjoyed the fiercest and often the best energies of Claudel and Cocteau; and between these two (almost polar in their opposition) one might set the best work of Alfred Jarry, Montherlant, Giraudoux, Supervielle and Anouilh. The Parisian treasury was further enriched by the efforts of such directors as Jacques Copeau and Gaston Baty; in recalling the intelligence and devotion with which great writers were served at the Vieux Colombier, one might well contrast the wretched treatment accorded to Hardy, for example, by the theatres of England. This devotion exacted a corresponding enthusiasm from the audience; those who share my own fondness for diaries

and journals will readily think of many cases to match, for instance, the love of the theatre which is patent in the notes of Rivière, Alain-Fournier and Julien Green. Consider also such pious labours as Gide's translation of *Antony and Cleopatra*; or that last bloom of the Third Republican theatre, Jean-Louis Barrault's adaptation of Laforge's *Hamlet*; or, finally, the English productions of Saint-Denis, by which even the most home-keeping, frog-suspecting of audiences was made aware of a tradition which descends, among authors, from Molière, Racine, Corneille and Marivaux to Hugo, Claudel and Mauriac, and has now lighted, it would seem, upon two of the best of France's younger writers—Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Two books of Sartre were obtainable before the war—a novel, *La Nausée*, and a book of stories, *Le Mur*. Both of these books were in the nature of toccatas—brilliant soundings and rangings of possible themes; Mr. John Lehmann, with his falconer's eye, sought out and published two of the stories in *New Writing*, but in general the books were little known and it may not be superfluous to sketch some of their more prominent traits. *Le Mur* itself is recognisably a *conte* of roughly conventional form, and treating of condemned Republican prisoners in Spain; Sartre shows here a great skill in the notation of physical fear, but the narrative has not that extreme singularity which later becomes his mark. Nor does *La Chambre*, a study of madness and the illusive power of human love, engage his most characteristic powers; Miss Kavan's readers, however, will be able to estimate the brilliance of the exercise. In *Intimité*, Sartre's incredulity before the myths of romantic love is given eloquent and sometimes admirably comical expression; one recognizes too, that for once a new aspect of this famous Intimacy, this *ignis fatuus* of the casual novel-reader, has been exposed. *L'Enfance d'un Chef* has again new points of interest; it describes the childhood and early youth of the indulged heir to a great commercial concern. Lucien is, in fact, one of nature's Cagoullards; and Sartre displays a power of destructive analysis and exact social observation which has not been equalled, in its own genre, since Aragon wrote the opening section of *Les Cloches de Bâle*. Other writers, notably Drieu la Rochelle in *Gilles*, had portrayed (perhaps more faithfully than they knew) the over-growth of the will which leads to Fascism; but Sartre in his seventy pages

gives the whole complexion of French society, so that the story has already the status of a historical novel, with an extinct period for its subject. In *L'Enfance d'un Chef* Sartre dashes at the most varied *milieux* with a verve and directness which make one hope that he will one day write novels of incident and circumstance; but even here the metaphysical boggy, the existential demon, the invisible worm are at work. In all these stories, Sartre is building up for the grand assault on the humanist position; beneath every passage of objective description may clearly be heard the tick of the existential bomb. In *La Nausée*, most subjective of novels, he presents us with what is in effect a lexicon of human absurdity. History, love, religion and art are given their congé; hope is an illusion, ambition a joke, passion an inconvenience. Human lives are an anthology of cant and self-deception. The hero, if one may so style him, of *La Nausée* endures voluntary exile in a provincial town; and there, in the restaurant where he eats every day, he watches his fellow-men, each with the delusions which bind him to life when in reality 'il n'y a rien, rien, aucune raison d'exister'. The extreme anti-humanism of *La Nausée*, its portrait of the human position as altogether false and absurd, is partly modified in the last pages of the book; but even then the ideal of humanism, the ideal for which Mr. Forster has so movingly disputed in this country, is allowed to come through, not by way of Tintoretto or Mozart, but by way of a dance-record of *Some of These Days*.

Life in Bouville, the town where most of *La Nausée* is set, is so dispiriting that even the acknowledged Hell of *Huis-Clos* comes at first as something of a relief. Certainly one does not conceive of Hell as a salon of the Second Empire, chiefly adorned by a large bronze. To Garcin, the moment of his arrival is an agreeable surprise. He finds no whips, no rack, no scourge. Room service is provided. Only the atrophied eyes of the waiter and the mysterious theft of his toothbrush suggest some subtler torture than that of the thumbscrew. For in Hell nobody drinks, eats, or sleeps. Nobody reads. Nobody goes out, and nobody has anything to do. It is always light, with the brilliance of electric light in a windowless room. Garcin, though of a reflective turn is appalled by the idea of this pauseless, featureless life—'la vie sans coupures'. *Huis-Clos* might indeed be prefaced by two lines from Webster:



That's the greatest torture souls feel in hell,  
In hell, that they must live, and cannot die.

Garcin is presently joined by Ines, whose appearance and manner of speech proclaim her a lesbian, and by Estelle, who has no great inner resources and has lived mostly in the indulgence and contemplation of her splendid person. For some time a curious mummery of politeness and normal usage absorbs the three prisoners. Terrestrial life retains its hold; but gradually the fact of Hell, and of their thenceforth perpetual communion with each other, begins to efface their memories of newspaper offices in Rio and chateaux in Corrèze. They have not previously met, and can think of no principle which would single out each of them as the companion of the others. They each give a short, and as later appears a false account of the sins which have brought them there; but there also no link can be found. It does, however, appear to them that, as they have no fourth person as jailer, they may each be the jailer of the two others; and Garcin proposes that they should make the best of their state by sitting in silence, giving no ground for further torment. Garcin is himself an inward-looking man; he is content, in another Websterian image, to turn his eyeballs inwards and progress through himself. Such a dismantling of the heart is indeed one function of hell; but it is conducted in public. Silence suits neither of the women, and Ines profits by Garcin's absorption to make up to Estelle; finding herself rebuffed, she abuses Garcin, who by the fact of his sex is beginning in spite of himself to engage Estelle's attention. Once again they hope to reach a truce by mutual confession; but although the crimes elicited in this way have at last the stamp of truth, their recital did not secure the desired peace. They have dismantled their hearts, but they continue both to scratch and pick at each other and to try desperately to recapture the life of the world above. They are now so closely entwined that they must be saved or damned together. Each has been set as a trap for the others; and for lack of the pity, the stirring of goodwill which is unknown in Hell, they must spin for ever in its deadly embrace. Garcin, as the only logician of the three, knows that it is upon Ines that their chances will finally rest. He appeals to her, and she refuses; the memory of her power to snatch women from their men sustains her even in Hell. Similarly she sets herself to break the perfunctory animal attachment which

asserts itself between Garcin and Estelle. There is, however, a destructive agent more powerful than her eldritch shrieks—the memory, or more exactly the possibility that on earth he was a coward. Estelle cannot picture to himself a torment of this kind, and her comfort is no comfort; Ines could help him, but will not. He batters on the door to get out, and suddenly it opens. But although, two moments before, he had been ready to endure any refinement of physical torture rather than the subtle impalpable duration of the windowless room, he now finds himself unable to leave. He cannot leave while Ines knows him for a coward. She, and not the sensual featherhead, is of his race; evil and shame and fear are more than words for her. She is the only person who can understand him and bring solace; but she is also without pity, a dead branch, a rotting leaf. Again he turns to Estelle, and again Ines contrives to break up their simulacrum of love. Then at last does Garcin discover the truth about Hell. Hell has no need of the whip and the white-hot poker, for ‘l’Enfer, c’est les Autres’.

It is impossible in a short paraphrase to give any idea of the art with which this parable races to its conclusion; nor can sedentary persons imagine the effect of the play upon its first audiences. In construction it is of course exceptionally tight; indeed few plays can have stuck so closely to their point. In *Les Mouches*, a play about Orestes and Electra, Sartre draws more largely upon the resources of the stage; but although the spectacle is at times passably ambitious, requiring the audience to see the entire planetary system and hear the music of the spheres, the philosophical point of the play is again an inward one. It is in this play, rather than in *Huis-Clos*, that the dilemmas of *La Nausée* recur. Orestes comes to the mourning town of Argos, with its perpetual plague of flies, in company with his tutor. He has been brought up as a human sceptic, disembarassed of all obligation to family, country, religion or occupation; but he is not content. ‘Quelle superbe absence’, he says, ‘que mon âme’. His tutor enjoins him on no account to meddle in his family affairs, and in this he is supported by Jupiter, whose disputes with Orestes are in fact the heart of the play. Orestes has all but decided to go away, when Electra appears in the town square. She approaches the statue of Jupiter, casting before it offerings of mussel-shells and cabbage-stalks; for the statue symbolizes for her the reign of Aegistheus and Clytemnestra,

the reign of guilt and superstition and remorse. This reign has made of Argos a doomed town, the dread of travellers; the murder of Agamemnon has laid upon it an inexpressible burden of guilt. This burden has curious results; public confession becomes, in Electra's phrase, the national sport. Shopkeepers at closing-time may be seen on their knees in the gutter, bellowing that they are assassins, adulterers, and cheats. The crimes of Aegistheus and Clytemnestra have become official crimes—foundation-crimes, in fact, which shock and interest nobody. Yet they themselves have aged and withered beneath their guilt; and once a year they preside at the national fête—the raising of the dead; for twenty-four hours the dead, invisible and intangible, yet permeate the town. The ritual of this fête is elaborated by Sartre in one of his most lavish inventions—a pantomime of abasement in which the mere fact of being alive is incriminated as an occasion for guilt. Orestes is about to disclose himself, and put a stop to the proceedings, when among the mourning crowd, a radiant white figure amidst its habitual black, Electra herself repudiates the convention by which Argos has become a dead city and herself a slave in her father's house. From this point the crux of the play is not so much the murder of Aegistheus and Clytemnestra, as the duel between Orestes and Jupiter; the murder and its consequences are detailed with the exactitude beloved of existential writers, but the abiding picture is that of the long disputes in which, after the model of Kierkegaard, man and god battle without intermediary. To Jupiter, the position at Argos has been quite satisfactory. The death of Agamemnon had not seriously displeased him. As he says to Aegistheus, 'Between kings, I may as well tell you that I committed the first crime myself, when I made man mortal.' After that, an assassin could only hasten by a little the normal course of events; moreover the murder of Agamemnon had been paid for most handsomely—twenty thousand persons had been plunged into perpetual repentance. In this way they were kept at a safe distance from the vital secret—the fact that men are free; Orestes knew this, and his triumph would imperil the reign of guilt and remorse. Jupiter has this key-speech in the scene in which he urges Aegistheus to safeguard himself: 'if once the idea of liberty has exploded within a human mind, the gods are powerless; it is the business of mortals, and only they—the other men—can strangle him or let him run free.' In the event, Orestes kills his

mother and stepfather; but even as Clytemnestra's howls ring through the palace, Electra is struck by the remorse which she had hoped never to feel. Even as she abuses the corpse of Aegistheus, calling him a dead fish and a detestable porker, the lamps of her mind are put out, and from ceiling and rafters she sees hanging in thousands the bloated flies of Argos, symbols of the Eumenides.

Next morning, in the Temple of Apollo, Orestes and Electra are discovered; in the temple they have the right of sanctuary, but around them lurk the Eumenides. These harpies are personified by Sartre with his usual vigour and zest; their ritual dances and bestial hymns quickly give place however to the central or philosophical theme—the repentance of Electra and the unbroken resolve of Orestes. Electra has petrified overnight; willingly in her anguish she would accept the Eumenides for lifelong companions. When Jupiter visits the two fugitives, her broken body and afflicted mind are all that he could wish. Orestes, too, crouched beneath the statue of Apollo and beleaguered by the buzzing Furies, might seem in poor case; but at this point there occurs an exchange which, telling as it is now, must have been doubly so at the Théâtre de la Cité in 1943. 'If you boast of your liberty,' says Jupiter, 'you can boast only of the liberty of the prisoner loaded with chains in his cell, the liberty of the crucified slave.' 'And why not?' Orestes replies. When argument has failed, Jupiter turns to his magic. The walls of the temple open, disclosing the starry vault of the sky; Jupiter conjures also 'the harmony of the spheres, the enormous song of the mineral graces,' and this vast music obligingly strikes up. Orestes remains firm; 'you are the king of the gods, Jupiter, the king of stones and stars and seas. But you are not the king of men.' Eventually Jupiter withdraws, and soon afterwards Electra follows him. Orestes is left alone with the Eumenides. When the doors of the temple are flung open, the people of Argos, massed on the threshold, set up a howl of rage; but they are silenced by the great speech of Orestes in which he vows to take upon himself, not only his own crime, but all those for which they have been mourning. He will take upon himself the Eumenides, the avenging plague of flies, leaving his people free of guilt, free to begin afresh. And as he leaves the sanctuary he takes with him, far from the town of Argos, the screaming company of the Furies.

In texture, *Les Mouches* is lightened and diversified by many short scenes which have necessarily been omitted here; nor does any individual speech give the quality of the play—the quality of sustained and impassioned argument about serious questions. This least marmoreal of writers contrives to impress rather by the general tone of the debate than by any conventional weight of language. It is evident, however, that existentialism, based as it is largely upon the inner rhetoric of temperament, is very well suited to the theatre (conversely it would be difficult, for example to imagine a play upon the theme of Dido and Aeneas and inspired by the work of Wittgenstein). Sartre is, however, a writer of known powers; and it might have been that the success of these two plays derived more from his considerable art than from their philosophical source. The plays of Albert Camus disprove this by showing that existentialism is in fact so powerful an irritant as usefully to permeate a whole school of writers.

Mr. Heppenstall, in these pages, has called the existentialist 'a metaphysical aesthete'. The subject of Camus' *Caligula* is, in brief, the trial of metaphysical aestheticism in its most extreme form. The young emperor had been a great reader, a delicate, scrupulous and inexperienced ruler, a tender and enveloping lover; he tried too to teach others, the young Scipio for instance, that though life was not easy, yet religion, love and art were sustaining forces; he said often that one should never cause others to suffer unjustly. Suddenly all this is changed. Startling and terrifying decrees pour forth; Caligula determines to teach the Romans the truth about existence, to set himself above the gods, to be in charge of a kingdom where the impossible is king. Good and evil, great and small, just and unjust are condemned as false distinctions; love is a word in the dictionary; memory is abolished. Only Caligula remains; only Caligula truly exists.

In the second act, his people measure the result. Many have had their sons killed, their property seized, their wives put in service as prostitutes; naturally an opposition party has been formed, and Cherea, the leader of this, sees further into Caligula than his followers. He sees that Caligula desires ultimately not a circumstantial, but a metaphysical end—the abolition of reason; the struggle therefore is not against bodily peril, but against an idea whose victory would mean the overthrow of man and of the world. Meanwhile, however, less perceptive Romans find enough

cause for rage and distress; for Caligula is always among them, poisoning harmless old men, absent-mindedly raping their wives, subjecting them to famine and enforcing their patronage of his brothels. Disinterested evil and hatred entirely absorb him. His caprices grow wilder; he appears before his people as Venus, and forces them to worship and pay tribute; prisoners, fearfully awaiting torture, are regaled instead with an oriental dance by Caligula *en travesti*. Caligula shams dead or dying, to entrap his enemies. Caligula holds a poetry contest, in which poets are given one minute in which to compose a poem about death. Those who fail (and all fail, except one) are cut short with a blast on Caligula's whistle; the emperor had hoped to find allies among the poets, but their wretched verses (appeals to fate, memories of childhood, images of the Styx) put them clearly among his enemies, and they are condemned to file round the stage, licking their tablets. Only the young Scipio, whose father Caligula had killed, understands the compulsion of death. Finally the emperor is left with nobody but his faithful mistress, Caesonia. She alone remembers the young and ardent Caligula, the great reader, the scrupulous lord. Gently he strangles her, so that no witness should remain. As Caligula turns towards the great mirror of his palace, he knows that the experiment has reached its furthest limit; the triumph of innocence must presently come. No sooner indeed has he smashed the mirror, to blot out his own image, than the conspirators strike him down. His last words are 'I am still alive!'

*Caligula* was written in 1938; but, as so often, art had run ahead of nature, and many of its most irrational scenes were to assume their full weight of meaning only in the years which followed their composition. For all its ghastly burden, *Caligula* is not a gloomy play; many of its scenes are full of the mischief and high-spirits so often absent from the intellectual theatre; and as in *Huis-Clos* and *Les Mouches* the excitement of great themes communicates itself to the reader. In *Le Malentendu*, a play five years later in date, Camus discards all those resources of the theatre which give to *Caligula* at times the character of a brilliant harlequinade. Here at any rate is existentialism *en pantoufles*. The story is that of a mother and daughter, proprietors of an hotel in Czechoslovakia, who live by killing a few wealthy travellers who come to stay with them; one day, meaning to make a last coup and then to retire to some more amiable clime, they kill the



mother's long-lost son, who has visited them in secret. The crime has been discussed in an entirely matter-of-fact way, with no suggestion of remorse or guilt; the pair indeed think themselves more kindly than life, in their treatment of their guests; for these do not suffer, and their bodies, when finally washed up on the shore of the lake, are less battered than those who have died by accident. In its first two acts, the play has the pace and air of a good thriller; it is in the third act, in the discovery of the crime and the scenes between the killers and their victim's widow, that it strays on to shelves and levels of argument which are almost unintelligible to readers not previously briefed. The insulation of both mother and daughter from the normal kindness and tenderness of human life allows the shock to glance off their consciousness; both embrace tranquilly the idea, the unimportant idea of their own death, leaving the widow alone with her grief, the grief which to them is no more than a meaningless word.

*Le Malentendu* suffers, in paraphrase, even more than the other three plays; for without close knowledge of its glacial, doom-laden course the mind necessarily rebels when asked to make so great a leap of sympathy. The most imperfect analysis may serve, however, to show that here is the fourth corner of a most impressive square. These four plays could be faulted at many points; and most of the more lovable and touching of human motives are missing from them; but they do show that in France the theatre is still a forerunner, a swift harbinger of the mind, and not, as so often here, its dispirited parasite. I have tried to indicate that the quality of these plays is such that they may be read and enjoyed independently of their temporal surround. It should, however, be said that the first remarkable fact about them is not their quality, but their existence; and their original audiences must have been quick to seize the many passages which touched, in an audacious and heartening way, upon their immediate distress. At a time when physical terror had become the natural element of ordinary men, and when the rulers of France were as anxious as those of Argos to embed their peoples deeply in guilt and remorse, the parables of *Huis-Clos* and *Les Mouches* cannot have failed of effect. And when, again, the widow in *Le Malentendu* begs a little pity of the old servant and he, speaking for the first time, says only 'Non!', this reply (a noise, rather than a speech) must have signalled for many in the audience that

collapse of all simple good feeling which they had themselves had to endure. At such a time the theatre can act as a sanctuary, or, more clinically, as a source of reviving gas; and these plays of Sartre and Camus are the proof that in France the fourth wall of the theatre is still, as it has always been, a triumphal arch of the mind.

JEAN PAULHAN

## BRAQUE, LE PATRON

### I. *The Lobster and the Lemons*

'HAVE you seen the Braque of a table with some fruit and a tablecloth in the Rue la Boétie?' I asked my doctor. 'No,' he replied. Then, remembering something: 'Oh, the lobster!' For a moment I had to recall that there really was a lobster. And even, unquestionably, a lobster in detail, with its feet as distinct as a centipede's, but rather fat like dumplings. Then the doctor said that it wasn't to his taste nor the kind of thing he admired, that there was nothing in it, and that he preferred a small landscape by Duplat which he had seen the day before when passing the Galerie Vavin. And I told him that that was exactly where he should be on his guard. That the picture we admire at first sight is most likely to be a superficial picture which disillusions us fairly quickly, one which lacks all reserves and which you realize (with disgust) was made in order to please. For painters are not so innocent; nor, whatever they may say about it, so stupid. Now it is easier to get oneself liked by the first person one meets than to convince him. It only needs a few recipes and admiration can be had for the asking.

It so happens that I have information on this subject. I am easily won over, shyness is not my strong point. I am afraid that in the past I have admired Moreau (Chocarne): I was very young. I have certainly admired the other Morot (of the Dragoons). And, not so long ago, there was a time when the last of the Moreaus (Gustave) held me under his spell. How I have always let myself be convinced. By Jean Grave and by Charles Maurras. By Doctor Freud and by all the economists. It has even been

lucky for me to accept everything in this naïve way. Soon enough I was to get over this admiration or the evidence of it. Let us look a bit further.

I do not say that I have found it. 'But what is it then,' the doctor asked me, 'if it is not admiration?' I replied (but I was becoming a little vague) that it was a certain rather considerable importance that the picture was taking for me; a certain personality (one that was rather disturbing). The personality of the painter? No—not at all. But as I was becoming vaguer still, I returned, as we say, to the facts.

I was going down the Rue la Boétie when the picture which was on the opposite side of the street (the side of the even numbers) called after me—I would not know how to put it more exactly. Well, I crossed the only crowded street in Paris. Seen from close up, the painting had changed. It was no longer noisy in its appeal. More silent and dull; without anything easy or fluid (in spite of the violet tablecloth and those two patches of brown amadou going off in silence). It would never have occurred to me to say that it was beautiful. Nor could I have said that it was agreeable. Nor call it 'a small picture' (although it was small). This lobster and these lemons were almost too lifelike; as if they had been seen from all sides at once. However, they retained something transparent—like some incongruous sentence. Obscure, yet complete, like a proverb. I would not have wanted to add anything to them.

Later, on several occasions, I used to recall them with reference to easier pictures. I suddenly noticed that if this jug of water, that glass of wine or tablecloth were visible to me, they were so by allusion to Braque's paintings (which are difficult). What seemed to prove the doctor right in spite of everything was that he first remembered the lobster and I did not. However, I could have defended myself on that point as well. I will return to it.

## 2. *More lifelike than Nature*

I don't really believe in apparitions or in ghosts. But I see that I am wrong. Because in reality we all believe in them and it would be more honest to admit it. An ordinary man has never completely recognized himself in his portraits. The day we are made to watch our profiles in reflecting mirrors, hear our voices

on records, read our old love letters, is a bad day for us: and straight away we feel like howling. It is so completely obvious that we are somehow different. Anything but that. Accurate photographs, exact portraits can be powerful, subtle, beautiful or ugly. They possess a quality which far surpasses all of these: they are not *true to life*. Montaigne was roughly the opposite of the sadistic rat shown in his portraits. Leonardo da Vinci did not really look like a chrysanthemum, nor Goethe a melon. From today we must warn our grandsons that we have nothing in common with the sad likenesses they will retain of us.

But it is more difficult to know *what* we are and the *physical* idea that we make of it. Perhaps we see ourselves secretly as flayed creatures? No, it's something less blood-stained. As skeletons? No, something less conclusive. Something which is at the same time intangible and exceedingly precise. It is fairly exactly what we call a spectre, and after all, that is familiar enough since we have it all the time in our heads. It is of as practical a species as a snail or a lemon.

A lemon. That is what I wanted to come to. For, naturally enough, it seems to us that the snail and the lemon should be contented with their appearance even if man is not; that the fact that he only did not have to be a snail himself is all that he deserves. But it is possible that he is nothing of the sort. It is even probable (immediately we think about it) that the snail also never stops (silently) protesting against his shell, his eyes on stilts, and even against the mother-of-pearl skin we see him in. It is possible that one day we shall find painters subtle enough—or, who knows, sufficiently informed to take the side of this inner snail; to treat the horns and the shell as they want to be treated.

I am only trying to be accurate, so much the worse if I appear stupid. That Braque has a secret, as there is a secret in Van Gogh or in Vermeer, is proved by an output which is at every moment curiously rich and satisfying: fluid (without there being any need for air); dazzling (without the slightest source of light); dramatic (without pretension), and at the same time considerate and calm: thought out in order to give the impression of a mirage imposed on its reality. However, as soon as I want to put a name to this secret or at any rate to the impression it gives me, this is what I find. Braque gives to lemons, grilled fish, and to tablecloths

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exactly the quality they would expect to have. What they were longing for: their own spectre. There is something sad in a duty, something bitter in waiting: it is the fact that we are afraid of being disappointed. But each one of Braque's pictures gives the impression of an enjoyable effort and of a duty done.

Of course, it is necessary to give proofs of this. And I will give them. After all, I am only saying things which are quite commonplace. (It would be enough to use another word—to speak of *ideal*, for example.) So much the better. What I also wanted to say is that Braque's painting is commonplace. Fantastic, of course, but ordinary. Fantastic in the same way in which (as soon as one thinks about it) it is fantastic to have a nose and two eyes; with the nose exactly between the eyes.

### 3. *Camouflage, guitars and papiers collés*

I spoke of proofs. Here is one: not so long ago they wanted to change the appearances of barrack huts, guns and trucks. These were thought to be vaguely dangerous. They would have liked them to look more like trees or rocks. Now they should have called in Braque and Picasso.

Camouflage has been the cubists' achievement: and if you wish, it was also their revenge. Those whom public opinion had consistently accused of making canvases which didn't resemble anything were found to be the only painters whose work was able to resemble precisely everything. The trees, meadows and leaves were witness to this: they were able to recognize themselves in the still-lives of Braque. In them, they found their own spectres, or guardian angels. The pilot who was uncertain of the forests of Ardennes or of Beauce no longer hesitated in front of a gun touched up by Braque: there at last was a real tree, a flat field or dead leaves which were really dead; he pulled away. I know why a canvas as large as a pocket handkerchief gave me a strange feeling that the painter had forgotten nothing. For the canvas could stretch itself out and conceal lorries, the countryside, the whole of France.

Of course, all the criticisms made about the cubists were not absurd. For instance, they were certainly satisfied with very little: a guitar, a pipe, a pack of cards or a fried egg. And (in the camouflage) with trees and fields—when it should have been

correct to imitate the sea. Only it so happens that these are the criticisms we should first make to painting itself.

If the painter had only had to reproduce the various aspects of things, (colour) photography would have sent him back to his family long ago. But we must really presume that painting adds a certain risk and mystery to photography. Some kind of metamorphosis, as we have had to speak of guardian angels or of spectres. Now, in any case, a metamorphosis is more striking if the object is more commonplace: more within our experience. We might be surprised to hear that a whale had changed itself into a palm tree. But we should be far more astonished if, in front of us, a fly changed itself into a violet. More agreeably surprised. Because a whale is already vaguely fantastic whereas a fly is not. We should never stop catching fresh flies for the pleasure of watching them turn into violets. Perhaps that is the reason (and what other can there be?) for the alleged monotony of cubist canvases; it looked as if Braque and Picasso had re-discovered the proof and the justification of painting just as previous painters had one day created perspective. The fact is that the pipe and the guitar *did not cease* being marvellous. We could take pleasure indefinitely in their adventures and tell them (like children), 'Start again'. Finally—but I am coming to my final argument.

This is that the cubists did not hesitate, if necessary, to welcome the patch or the newspaper itself on to their canvas. We have been told a thousand times in the past that art was nature viewed through a temperament. The painters of those times were afraid precisely of lacking temperament. Paying attention to the tree, of course, and to the sun—more intent still in reproducing the tree or the sun in a way which would be personal to them; to show exactly that they were really there. One painted using cross-hatching, another commas, and another dots. It looked as if even painting itself might escape them, and that they were obliged to retain it each minute by their personal tricks and traps.

The cubists do not have so many anxieties probably because they hardly have any reason for uneasiness. They quite simply put in a newspaper or needlework itself wherever they might have to imitate newspaper or needlework. Painting has never completely been able to dispense with imitation. It is one of its natural resources. It is also one of its dangers. It is continually being threatened by imitation (as is the novel by realism). And

we may well be afraid that at any moment imitation will consume it. But Braque and Picasso had passed the danger. They could dispense with all personality to the point at which even the objects themselves instead of their images took their place on their canvases.

In short, once and for all, with them the painter had made his discovery. After that he kept quiet, engrossed in the foregone conclusion of things, and everything was audible down to the most diffident whisper of a lemon or a lobster.

#### 4. *Myths of Georges Braque*

Braque's expression is so humble that he seems to have seen peace. But he has woodcutter's shoulders and a giant's figure.

'Do you understand, I am worried,' Vollard said to him. 'If my Renoir is burnt and all that remains is a small corner, I will always know that it is still a Renoir. But if it were my Braque...' 'Thank God,' said Braque, who that very day gave up signing his pictures.

Housepainters, Braque's father and grandfather were responsible for all the imitation wood to be seen in Le Havre towards the end of the nineteenth century. 'They were working for my good conscience,' said Braque.

'Scholars are lucky people. If I were a scholar I would know how to do one of my pictures over again.'

'I have heard it said that once you took one of your pictures into a field.' 'Yes, I have had a passion for dragging them around everywhere, to have them meet things. To see if they would hold their own.'

He is rather doubled up. He comes and goes, pulls out ten canvases at a time, some of which rest on easels, others on a kind of grid on the ground. Sometimes he moves a dead leaf, a crab's foot, a lizard's skeleton. What were they expecting on the table?

Looking at a still-life, someone remarked to him, 'But this lighting doesn't exist in nature'. 'And I, am I then not a part of nature?'

'But where then does this light come from?' 'Ah, that comes from another canvas which you don't know.' He goes and fetches it. It is a flat grey which would appear dull if it weren't for an unfinished patch of red in the centre. 'I like it,' adds Braque, 'but I hardly ever show it'.



'There is nothing Chamisso denies himself. He speaks all languages. What a talent, what vice! What saves him', said Braque, 'is that he is worried. Jockeys know this: that the most vicious of all horses are those that do not sweat.'

A young girl comes into his studio, walks around, passes comments, and admires until the day when Braque says to his canvas: 'Now, you must defend yourself'.

('Painting is jealous,' said Michelangelo.)

From his notebooks, in which Braque piles up at random guitars, fruit dishes and masses of lines which are neither fruit dish nor guitar, which are nothing at all, I get the impression that Braque doesn't so much look for things as let them look for him. By something obsessional which multiplies clues and signs and prompts from every side.

He cuts out an advertisement from the *Petit Parisien*. It is a wireless set—box, bars of music, on a watered black background—which reminds one oddly of a Braque. 'But don't let us obstruct our memory,' he said.

'The painter,' said Braque, 'is stuffed with natural elements. He is never quite sure what he is going to *bring up*.'

People were surprised that he did not use a large number of subjects. 'Even so, I take what I need, wherever it finds me!'

'Oh, I don't know,' he said again, 'if what I am putting on here will be a cliff or a woman!'

'When I begin, it seems to me that my picture is on the other side, only covered over with this white dust, which is the canvas. All I have to do is to dust it off. I have a small brush to liberate the blue, another for the green, or for the yellow: they are my paint brushes. When everything is cleaned, the picture is finished.'

### 5. *Seeing the wrong way round*

Michelangelo, although weakly built, used to sculpt with ferocity. To anyone expressing surprise at this, he replied, 'I hate this marble which is separating me from my statue.'

We must believe him, and Braque also. Whoever wishes to approach a painter (or a sculptor) is resigned soon enough to taking the part of *what* obsesses him against him. It isn't so easy.—Ah, it's even absurd. Be serious. It is the painter who makes the picture; not the picture the painter.—Yes.—Then that would be

to see things the opposite way round.—Probably, but as far as that is concerned. . .

Just now I alluded to the impressionists. We must come back to them. I am not one of those timid people who at all costs would like to forbid painters showing us violet shadows and green cows if it pleases them to do so. A green cow seems to me to have a certain charm; it might also have its justification. But this justification is surely not the same as that which the nineteenth-century painters gave us, one which has always appeared to me painfully weak.

For Monet or Signac persisted in demonstrating that it was necessary for them to paint violet shadows (for example) because the shadows were in reality violet (and not black as ordinary sight sees them). It was enough to bring up a few physical laws; amongst others, that the shadow is always slightly coloured with its complementary. According to the case, this was called the optical mixture, the complementary colour or the simultaneous contrast. The painter, in fact, was continually appealing to the expert against the man in the street, to specialists instead of to ordinary people: he did not in any way claim—as perhaps he would have been wise to do, if he had been really courageous, that he was quite free to paint green cows; he claimed, strangely enough, that he was not free not to paint green cows—since this, he said, is how the sun makes fun of him and of us. (And who would dare object to the sun?) As we have seen, he was punished for it and his painting became more personal—confetti, commas or squiggles—as his theory became impersonal. Of course, he could have pushed still further in this direction and shown us the light nebulae (since, according to modern physicists, it seems that such is the nature of cows). But in this case it is a question of optics and another example will be more obvious: it is a well-established fact that nature, cows and even the sun impose themselves on the reverse side of our retina. And their learned, much too learned, theory would logically have led Signac and Monet to show us men and trees upside down. This they did not dare to do because of some remnant of shame. To tell the truth, it would be absurd to do this; for a thousand reasons which can incidentally be so clearly seen that we can draw another conclusion from them.

It is often said that painters change the appearance of the world to our eyes; men no longer see exactly the same clouds after Turner, the same women after Watteau—the same lemons after

Braque. In short, art imitates nature less than nature imitates art. But perhaps the reason for this is quite a simple one. That in the very principle of vision there is an absurd and paradoxical action: something purely arbitrary. If we see men standing on their feet, it is because it has pleased us to see them standing straight. Everything was against it: our eye only offered us a forked tree. Nature led us to believe that cows rested on their backs and houses on their roofs. We have had to defend ourselves from this. By a really human choice. By a painter's choice.

I haven't said either that Braque was always obvious: but his most difficult canvases came to illuminate for me other pictures which had no mystery. He painted lemons and it seemed to me that in some way or another it was the lemon which had begun. I found it common-place, but just as strange as it was common-place. At last I learnt that Braque himself conceived his painting in the wrong way round order in which I saw it. In short, in order to understand Braque, I had to repeat the same absurd choice and prejudice which make us see the world in space. As if the painter was forcing us the whole time to reconsider the oldest, most serious human decisions.

I spoke just now of presence and of a certain position which the picture occupied for me. But perhaps you begin to suspect what position I mean, and of what presence an active yet silent, fiery yet suppressed painting tells me. After all, it is serious enough for me to be forgiven for having forgotten the lobster.

#### 6. *Modern beauty and metaphysics*

No. I will no longer pretend to be in ignorance of what all the German art critics have written, of what is repeated by all the museum directors of Germany, and of what the smallest boy from Patagonia knows when he comes to learn painting in Montparnasse—and also of what my doctor (along with a few other good French bourgeois) is the only person to be in ignorance of. That the beginning of the twentieth century was a period of giants. That the period and the country which has seen Braque, Picasso and Rouault suddenly shine out after Cézanne, Van Gogh and Seurat, is favoured among all countries and at all times; even more than the Italian Renaissance and the great epoch of Holland. There is a modern beauty next to which the beauty of the primitives and of the classics looks pale.

It is more difficult to put a name to this beauty. I do not see all its features; but, at least, I see the questions it poses. They are riddles, such as children and primitives make (and it is no accident if negro art has its say about this): what is more true to life than nature? What is obvious without being proved? Magnificent without being admired? Or else: 'It is not the painter who began, it is the picture.' What is it? The more we see it the more it astonishes us. What is it? And again: 'What is there behind space and time?' Briefly, a metaphysical beauty.

On that point there is a misunderstanding. Strangely enough, we admit that metaphysics consist of books which, in any case, are rather difficult and boring. Now, the slightest honesty is enough to see that the contrary is true. We all know what are time and space, liberty and even the eternal. We know it very well so long as we don't think about it. So long as we know it, so to speak, obliquely. It is, on reflection, that everything gets mixed up, and then the boring books arrive, and ultimately metaphysics are not books, they are reality if there is such a thing. That is not something difficult but the most widely-shared thing in the world. Not boring but dazzling: and we see the world by its light. A delicate light I know, if it escapes our notice. Let the painter then show us how to make it permanent.

These last months Braque is opening a large window above his usual still-life. But neither the sun nor the clouds in the least succeed in dislocating or spoiling the table and the wash-basin, the loaf of bread or the two red mullet which he transforms into our delight and our repose: our satisfaction. Have I *evoked* his picture clearly enough? It is also easier to talk of them obliquely rather than directly if this painter whom one might have believed content with a fish and with a crust of bread seems, to take a better look at him, haunted by shells and by hair, by waves and by smiles. However, it is true that the chunk of bread is enough. Without any obvious precedents, or ancestry which is of any value. The whole time Braque gives the impression of a man who commands with precision and who ratifies the authentic. He makes his canvases contain a world which is strangely full: autonomous to the point at which each colour loses its native qualities in them: the green ceases to be rural, the red violent, and the violet ambiguous. People have dealt intelligently with his passion for working-drawings and for problems—

but also with his feminine tenderness; with his exaggerated fantasy—but with his thick and too rebellious a texture. People have called him the master of concrete relations and I would rather call him the master of invisible relations. But someone will say, why Braque rather than . . . ? I can only reply one thing (as I have already said): Braque came to look for me. Besides, these questions of precedence are invidious. I would be embarrassed to have to decide if Braque were the most inventive or the most varied artist of our time. But if the great painter is the man who gives at the same time the most precise and the most nourishing conception of painting, then without hesitation it is Braque I will take for my *patron* and my law.

[Translated by PETER WATSON. Reprinted from *Poésie*, 43]

STEPHEN SPENDER

## IMPRESSIONS OF FRENCH POETRY IN WARTIME

It is necessary to preface these impressions with an apology. I have had as little time as most people of my age group to form considered judgements about recent literature in my own language, still less in French. It is only because I am in the fortunate position of having been one of the few people to have the opportunity of reading some of the recent work of French poets that my immediate reactions may, to some extent, be a guide to other readers, as French books become accessible to them.

The poems of Aragon and of Eluard have both been published in England during the war. I doubt whether any of the poets less known here has Aragon's passion and virtuosity or the crystalline quality of Eluard at his best. Aragon's poetry is like a gale of patriotism which contains air-pockets of tenderness, and it sustains its impetuosity because, although it bears one along breathlessly, the thought hardly ever obstructs the reader. Eluard is the very opposite of Aragon; he is a poet of static crystal images full of light and an impression of silence; he is sculptural and it is the forms into which his thought is poured which the reader gazes on. Pierre Emmanuel, Loys Masson, Pierre

Seghers, André Frénaud, are poets who use poetry often as a means of thinking aloud, and although this sometimes leads to looseness of form, which is paralleled in the hasty work of some of the English poets of this war, their thought is always interesting, and for the English reader today it is often a revelation.

Pierre Emmanuel is a poet in the sense that the Old Testament Prophets are poets rather than a deliberate and conscious literary artist of the kind to which we are accustomed in poetry. He brings a message of the rebirth of religious idealism in a world of destruction:

Mais il dit 'Joie'. Et nous les hommes sans visage  
témoins de l'homme en son anéantissement  
nous nous réjouissons car Dieu montre Sa Face  
non point le Dieu tremblant des papes et des rois  
mais le Seigneur dont la Colère est éternelle,  
le miséricordieux qui nous brûle le sang.  
Nous nous réjouissons parce que tout est Verbe,  
Christ une fois pour toutes a étendu les bras,  
il n'est plus place désormais pour le blasphème,  
tout est résumé dans la Lettre de la Croix.

This is the language or religious revivalism—not of theology, and one may wonder why it is, after all, convincing, in spite of the facts that it is scarcely removed from prose and that it is exactly the kind of utterance which poets have for decades been carefully avoiding. The answer is that it has the force of things actually experienced, a hope, a revelation which entirely holds one's interest, because it is entirely sincere. The necessity of believing in an intellectualized dogmatic religion seems to have been removed from these poets by the Occupation which inspired their minds with a simple passion of revivalism. The next ten years will show whether this spirit which had the power to inspire individual Frenchmen to extraordinary poems and extraordinary acts of courage (the poems themselves often seem acts of courage) will fertilize the France which is now in process of re-making. If it has not, this poetry will seem the voice of a sad lost hope, too simple in its credulity. But today it is undoubtedly a powerful force, a voice to which one can listen with profound respect, suspending one's judgement that it is, from a literary point of view, perhaps often over-rhetorical.

Emmanuel can, moreover, often write with true command of a rhetoric very sympathetic to English ears, because it strikes one as almost Elizabethan:

O rues où le passant tette une Ombre blafarde  
le sang est verte sous vos réverbères de mort  
et les poumons de ceux qui nagent en vos brumes  
deviennent des branchies de verre que le vent  
brise en hiver avec les branches mortes!

Pierre Seghers is a poet of the Resistance. His poems have great courage and simplicity and their theme is love of ordinary things and an impassioned hatred of the enemy. The *Poèmes Clandestins* are poems of 'news' containing statements like this:

Mon ami loin de son pays, avec sa femme  
—C'est dans les fermes qu'elle va, pour des journées.  
Chacun la croit  
couturière. Mais elle a traversé l'Amérique  
quand l'Allemagne l'avait chassée; on sait là-bas  
son nom, le vrai; on la connaît, dix mille têtes  
craient vers eux au meeting de Minnesota.

The theme of Paris occurs in Seghers, but it strikes one as anything but urban or sophisticated, though showing at times the influence of Apollinaire. It is poetry that has taken to the woods, and it has beauty and tenderness:

J'ai chanté aussi  
La joie les soucis  
La vie monotone  
La hotte du temps  
L'hiver le printemps  
Et le jaune automne . . .

Loys Masson, like Pierre Emmanuel, is a biblical poet, and he reminds me in some of his work of T. S. Eliot in *Journey of the Magi* and *A Song for Simeon*. The fable of a voyage recurs again and again. It is especially memorable in two poems, *Le Voilier Nord* and *Le Grand Yacht Despair*. How beautifully Masson conveys the poetry of departure:



L'île mourut au tournant de la lame  
 Les fanaux dansèrent le mât plia  
 La lune pleine monta sur l'avant  
 Et toute la mer fut blanche et troublante  
 Et tout le ciel fut mauve et se fondant.  
 Il y eut des anges dans les cordages  
 Qui chantèrent . . .

The nature of the voyage is revealed in the last lines:

C'est vrai, l'on faisait le même chemin  
 Depuis ses dix années dans l'étendue  
 C'était les mêmes portes exactement  
 Où l'on avait mouillé dix ans avant  
 Dans notre voyage sur l'océan  
 L'étoile ne brillait que dans nos yeux  
 L'on avait suivi un rêve de plus  
 C'était pour ça ces longs dix ans de route  
 Le nord cherché le nord n'existait pas.

Perhaps even more remarkable are the psalm-like series of poems in long biblical metres entitled *Terre*. There is also an extremely moving poem at once of prayer and of defiance, *Otages Fusillés à Chateaubriant*, which contains lines, which like other lines of these poets, acquire dignity because they are a part of one movement of feeling shared by many voices and many hearts:

Le tyran peut dresser jusqu'au ciel ces cathédrales d'épouvante  
 et à tous les carrefours donner chaque soir son bal  
 pourpre,  
 il ne fera pas tomber ces paupières que l'horreur retient  
 écarquillées  
 tremblantes au vent d'aube et de meurtre,  
 Par-dessus les épaules des bourreaux les yeux victimes  
 éternellement le fixent  
 sur les branches de la croix  
 quand octobre déchiré entre les faisceaux crie Christ  
 Christ.

André Frénaud, who was for some time a prisoner of war, is a more literary poet, less torn by outward experience, charmed by an inner calm of his own nature which seems a haven to be

grateful for, after one has read several of these poets. He is himself conscious of this inner peace which can produce beautiful images and lines, as his poem *Refuge* shows:

Refuge au-dessus de la vue  
revenu des futurs orages  
ma sérénité non conquise  
belle demeure en dehors de la vie . . .

It is difficult to compare these quiet and transparent poems with the work of M. Frénaud's comrades, but they seem to me to have a beauty heightened to poignancy by the tension of maintaining an inner calm throughout these years. M. Frénaud writes in a different vein in *La Route*, a poem about Germany which appears in the anthology *Poètes Prisonniers*, in which he compares his lot to that of an oarsman in a galley. This poem is not great poetry, it is part of the 'news' poetry of the Resistance, but it is revealing not only of the feelings of a prisoner, but also of the German landscape and of the sullen German mood which made so deep an impression on some French witnesses.

Henri Michaux expresses, in the introduction to his poems selected in the *Panorama de la Jeune Poésie Française*, a point of view which seems rather surprising when coming from a French writer. 'La seule ambition de faire un poème suffit à le tuer.' Therefore he writes his poems, which he does not consider as poems, straight off, as the result of a bet or after a fit of temper. Of course it is true that most poems, like most other works of art, are killed in the effort of making them, and this by no means novel argument has been put forward recently all over the world as a reason for preferring children's immediate intuitive efforts of self-expression to finished works of art. Michaux's poems do have a quality of immediacy. At the same time they are not as lacking in art as might appear, because M. Michaux has many years of literary training behind him and he also has a gift of precision which prevents his first drafts suffering from that verboseness and uncertainty which usually cancels out the virtue of freshness in the sketches of most writers. His poems are for the most part insights into psychological situations in which the individual sees himself in a sudden immediate relation to single objects or to the Whole outside himself: life, the still-life self-sufficient calm of an apple on a plate, night, the writer's

Opposite Self, death, and so on. The clinching relationship of the self with its opposite or with some symbolic aspect of natural objects, is the chief occasion of momentary visions in modern life, and Michaux seizes on these visions which are the experience of everybody, and which therefore usually go unnoticed, and pins them down:

Mais Toi, quand viendras-tu?  
 Un jour, étendant Ta main  
 sur le quartier où j'habite,  
 au moment mûr où je désespère vraiment;  
 dans une seconde de tonnerre,  
 m'arrachant avec terreur et souveraineté  
 de mon corps et du corps croûteux  
 des mes pensées-images, ridicules univers;  
 lâchant en moi ton épouvantable sonde,  
 l'effroyable fraiseuse, de Ta présence,  
 élevant en un instant sur ma diarrhée  
 Ta droite et insurmountable cathédrale;  
 me projetant non comme homme  
 mais, comme obus dans la voie verticale,  
 TU VIENDRAS,

Tu viendras, si tu existes,  
 appâté par mon gachis,  
 mon odieuse autonomie;  
 Sortant de l'Ether, de n'importe où, de dessous  
     mon moi bouleversé peut-être;  
 jetant mon alumette dans Ta démesure,  
 et adieu, Michaux.  
 Ou bien, quoi?  
 Jamais? Non?  
 Dis, Gros Lot, où veux-tu donc tomber?

A poem entitled *Dans La Nuit* begins:

Dans la nuit  
 Dans la Nuit  
 Je me suis uni à la nuit  
 A la nuit sans limites  
 A la nuit.

Such poetry appears to be an exercise in free association by a man skilled in expressing his ideas without difficulty and with immediacy. Michaux, although he is unique, has it in common with Emmanuel and Masson, that his poems are acts of surrender to very strong tides of feeling. They express more than they create. Possibly when feeling and the rhetoric of public emotion is strong and unified enough (as during the Occupation) self-expression seems more important than creation. However, *Panorama de la Jeune Poésie* reminds us that there is Audiberti who can create an enormous picture, recalling Baudelaire, of the poet compared to Lazarus, and Patrice de La Tour du Pain, who writes a strange legendary poetry, of scenes which appear to be pressed down on by hot skies. In the same anthology there is a touching poem, *La Mer Intérieure* by Max-Pol Fouchet, who describes very movingly a scene of drowning. Other poets whose poems are noteworthy are Robert Ganzo, Lanza del Vasto (who writes lines of great intensity) and Luc Estang. Another interesting book is *L'Archangélique* by Georges Bataille.

Pierre Jean Jouve, like Aragon and Eluard, was well known in this country before the war, so that his poetry falls outside the scope of this essay which is intended to be an introduction to work almost unknown. However, I should note that he seems to have developed during the war as strikingly as Aragon, though in a different direction. His volume *Vers Majeurs* contains magnificent poetry, mystical as all his work is mystical, but with a strength in its imagery as great as that of the symbolists, a music of great solemnity, and a firm and clear grasp of the frightfulness of the present era. Perhaps his wonderful poem *Ville Atroce* on the subject of Paris will be esteemed above all the many others written in this epoch about Paris, with its great opening which recalls the splendour of Bach:

Ville atroce ô capitale de mes journées  
O ville infortunée, livrée aux âmes basses!

En toi quand j'arrivais sur l'avenue de flamme  
Parmi juin miroitante des millions d'objets  
En marche et d'espérance verte et d'oriflammes  
De la dure Arche de Triomphe qui coulait

O ville célébrée! je voyais ta carcasse  
 De pierre rose et rêve immense et étagée  
 Le Louvre couché sous la zone du grand ciel  
 Lilas, et l'infini des tours accumulées

La vaste mer bâtie de la paix et la guerre  
 Entassement gloire sur gloire! et mes douleurs  
 Surprises par le temps pleines de rire et songes  
 Quand l'Obélisque monte a la place d'honneur.

Navire humain sous le plus vaste des étés  
 Lourd de détresse auquel j'avais rangé ma rame  
 Où tue était la mer dans les calculs infâmes  
 Du typhon préparé par tous les mariniérs;  
 Sage et mauvais navire et la poupe encor reine  
 Trop de clarté méchante allongeait tes bas flancs  
 Trop d'assurance avait ton entrepont de haine  
 Trop de mensonge aux mâts bleus blancs rouges flottants,  
 Tout le monde était mort, et sans voir j'allais ivre.

This has the tempestuous passion of the Resistance poets, and at the same time it has lost nothing in that psychological depth, clear gravity and created experience which, until the war, appeared to be the best tendencies in modern poetry in Europe. These lines recall indeed the splendour and indignation and ruthless power of analysis of Leopardi's *All'Italia*:

Oimé quante ferite,  
 Che lividor, che sangue! oh qual ti veggio,  
 Formossissima donna! Io chiedo al cielo  
 E al mondo: dite dite:  
 Chi la ridusse a tale? E questo e peggio,  
 Che di catene ha carche ambe le braccia.

Strange that this terrible prophetic cry should have been taken up by France, not before it had been heard during the Spanish war in the mouth of the poet, hanged by Franco, Miguel Hernandez:

Men, worlds, nations,  
 pay heed, listen to my cry pouring out blood,  
 gather together the pulses of my breaking heart  
 into your spacious hearts,  
 because I clutch the soul when I sing.

Singing I defend myself  
and I defend my people when the barbarians of crime  
imprint on my people their hooves  
of powder and desolation.

It is this deep unity with the agony of humanity in Europe, most deeply felt in the Latin nations, which makes the poetry written during the years of the German occupation in France, like a choral movement which seems to be the fulfilment of a theme first heard in the French Revolution and again in the Europe of the Risorgimento.

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## PHILIP TOYNBEE

# SOME TRENDS AND TRADITIONS IN MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE

IN an earlier essay I made a rash comparison of the English and French situations, much to the disadvantage of England. Though I would now modify that judgement, I still believe that in the consciousness both of tradition and of revolt from tradition France has gained important qualities which England lacks.

No one, I think, would deny the originality of Paul Valéry, both as poet and essayist. Yet it is clear that his intellectual method, his outlook and the whole atmosphere which surrounds him is

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firmly traditional. There is nothing paradoxical in this. All the great classical writers of France have shared both the originality and the allegiance. But there is a clear distinction between the iconoclasm of the surrealists and Valéry's adherence to, and far-reaching extension of a tradition.

The three books which he has published since 1939 are well suited to illustrate his position. The two series of *Tel Quel* form a collection of aphorisms, reflections and critical judgements, some of which were published as early as 1910. *Variété V*, like its predecessors, is a book of contemporary essays and incidental writing.

There is no means, in the two volumes of *Tel Quel*, of affixing a date to any item—nor can I find the least internal evidence of lateness or earliness. For a knowledgeable reader of Valéry it may be possible to discern development, but the strongest impression on anyone so inexperienced as myself must be of homogeneity. I would imagine that there is little in either volume which Valéry *could* not have written either in 1910 or in 1944. It may be that in the contemporary *Variété V* there is an even greater perfection of style, but I can detect no modification of outlook, no new or discarded belief.

With so quotable a writer there is a temptation to do little more than make a selection of illustrative passages: it is a temptation which I have not resisted. Valéry is not, explicitly and violently not, a philosopher. Nowhere is it possible to detect the least desire to build up a uniform system of belief. The strong sense of unity which his writing gives comes solely from his robust and tightly integrated personality. Intellectually he often contradicts himself—and indeed he proclaims in his preface that he has done so—yet there is no contradiction in his fundamental attitude, no anomaly in the personality he presents. Sometimes he writes exquisite poetry in prose, more often a crystalline, close-shorn and, in its most literal sense, a severely prosaic prose, yet these different methods of expression do not suggest the least diffusion or untidiness of personality. These are simply the reverse sides of the same bright coin.

I have already emphasized an explicit classicism. 'Racine écrit à Boileau sur le II<sup>e</sup> Cantique, il discute l'emploi du mot Misérables, au lieu de Infortunés. Ces minuties qui fond le beau et sont l'atome du pur ont bien disparu du souci littéraire.'



‘Un romantique qui a appris son métier devient un classique.’

Yet, as the second quotation goes some way to show, it is very far from being a classicism which looks only backwards to Racine and Boileau. Properly understood tradition is a living thing which must be carried on. ‘Là où je suis arrivé avec peine, à bout de souffle, un autre surgit, frais et plein de liberté, qui saisit l’idée, la détache de ma fatigue. . . .’

There are some aphorisms in *Tel Quel* which would not seem out of place among Rochefoucauld’s *Maximes*.

‘Le Goût est fait de mille dégoûts.’

‘Les plus grands hommes sont des hommes qui ont osé se fier à leurs jugements propres—et pareillement les plus sots.’

And in the closest Valéry ever approaches to intimacy the resemblance is even more striking.

‘Il n’existe pas d’être capable d’aimer un autre être tel qu’il est. On demande des modifications, car on n’aime jamais qu’un fantôme. Ce qui est réel ne peut être désiré, car il est réel. Je t’adore, mais ce nez, mais cet habit que vous avez. . . .’

‘L’ami sincère:

Qui osera dire à son ami: je t’avais parfaitement oublié. . . .’

And if at times there is too self-conscious and banal a cynicism (‘Il faut toujours s’excuser de bien faire. Rien ne blesse plus’), this is greatly the exception. To write in the manner of Rochefoucauld involves neither imitation nor repetition. This kind of astringency (at its clear best it is precisely astringency, quite without the romantic taint of cynicism) is no more the prerogative of the seventeenth century than of any other.

Yet I do not find that Valéry is most fully expressed in his closest resemblance to past aphorisms. It is rather in the free astonishing range of his intellect, in the strange penetrating explorations, the unheralded incongruities.

‘Je ne pense pas que les esprits puissants aient besoin de l’intensité des impressions. Elle leur est plutôt funeste, étant ceux qui de rien font quelque chose.’

‘Une certitude peut détruire une certitude: mais une idée ne détruit pas l’autre. Elle détruit sa présence, non sa possibilité.’

‘Est prose l’écrit qui a un but exprimable par un autre écrit.’

‘Nos plus importantes pensées sont celles qui contredisent nos sentiments.’

Somewhere else he evolves the fascinating *jue d’esprit* of

imagining that if a thread were of exactly equal strength throughout its whole length, no suspended weight could break it: it wouldn't know *where* to break. It is not necessary to agree with all or any of these ideas to appreciate their subtlety and originality. The statement about prose, for example, is so instantly illuminating that the reader may be dazzled out of recognizing that Valéry has done no more than provide a new definition, and a false one. He has simply elected to describe as poetry all prose in which 'le mot le plus juste' has been chosen from many. This does nothing to overcome the distinction which remains between, for example, good prose and bad poetry. But it is a paradoxical quality of this mind to combine illumination with distortion. Nor is this a pejorative judgement. The little whip-crack sentence stirs a sluggish mind and reveals at least one hidden element of truth. Few single sentences do so much.

However perverse Valéry's hostility to the novel may seem, it is hard to deny that his own writing is the best of all his arguments. Many novels have been written on a poorer theme than a single paragraph from *Tel Quel*. 'La plus belle femme, l'être séduisant, songent: "Il m'arrive, songent-ils, que presque pas un ne s'approche de moi, qu'il ne se sente prendre sur moi une sorte de droit, et je ne sais quelle propriété jalouse. Je leur appartiens parce que je leur plais."

'Leur prétention m'est insupportable.... Je ne pourrais vivre sans elle.'

Although he refuses almost churlishly to propound a doctrine ('Toute doctrine se présente nécessairement comme une affaire plus avantageuse que les autres. Elle dépend donc des autres'), and although he contemptuously refuses to proselytize, Valéry can state his personal faith with the warmest emphasis or in terms of shrewdest analysis.

'Le véritable orgueil est le culte rendu à ce que l'on voudrait faire, le mépris de ce que l'on peut, la préférence lucide, sauvage, implacable de son idéal.' *Mon Dieu est plus fort que le tien.*

'Un poème n'est jamais achevé—c'est toujours un accident qui le termine, c'est-à-dire qui le donne au public.... Mais jamais l'état même de l'ouvrage (si l'auteur n'est pas un sot) ne montre qu'il ne pourrait être poussé, changé, considéré comme première approximation, ou origine d'une recherche nouvelle.'

And when he suggests a morality outside the private morality

of the artist, nothing, I think, could be more typical of the unifying personality which holds all these scattered reflections so lightly together '...on pourrait faire tout le *mal* que l'on voudrait, à la condition expresse de l'avoir nettement voulu et prévu en tant que mal, sans rien s'être épargné de sa connaissance...et considérant comme défendu absolu toute fissure pour le remords... Fais ce que tu veux si tu pourras le supporter indéfiniment.'

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In *Variété V* nothing is changed except that the form of the book is more leisurely. In an essay like *L'Homme et la Coquille* those extremes of scientific precision and poetic beauty which had appeared separately in the short fragments of *Tel Quel*, are marvellously interfused. There is a quality in the writing which seems to take a conchoid mystery from the shell which he describes. Yet this symbolic beauty of language is supported by an almost unbearable intensity of intellectual examination. The result is one of the most entrancing and stimulating essays which I have ever read.

Most of these essays are literary studies—on his own early poetry, on Phèdre, Flaubert, Descartes and Swedenborg. The article on Flaubert is impudently patronising, and it is in his reflections on Swedenborg that Valéry shows his finest critical sensibility. One anticipated here an easier and more obvious victim for the cruel needles which he had wielded against Saint Flaubert. But Valéry has chosen to be at his justest and most serious; there is not a word of ridicule. Swedenborg's intellectual achievements are warmly recognized and his mystical claims are examined with the caution which is the due of every sincere mystic. Valéry makes no attempt to deny or ridicule the experiences, but judges them strictly on the intellectual plane to which they have wilfully attached themselves. The detailed and learned anatomical comparisons of the *Arcana Cælestia* suggest precisely that the intellect was too busy, that the mystical experience has been too rigidly tied down. Surely no criticism could be more just or more respectful.

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Valéry's suggestion that the romantic becomes a classicist as soon as he has learned his trade (though little more than another juggling with a definition) is given a kind of indirect and qualified

sense in *Faux Pas*, the essays of Maurice Blanchot. The introduction, *de l'Angoisse au Langage*, has made a deep impression in France as an original and penetrating attempt to solve the ancient problem of why a writer writes. I can discuss this essay only with the severest caution for, after three careful readings I have failed fully to understand it. The combination of obvious subtlety of thought and profundity of intention with the sometimes insuperable difficulties of the French language has proved too formidable. My principal difficulty lies in this. Approximately the theme of the essay is the conflict in the writer of an anguish (*angoisse*) which drives him on the one hand to express himself, on the other to be silent. Yet I can nowhere find the motive or need for silence adequately explained.

'Je ne veux pas parvenir à quelque chose, se dit l'écrivain, je veux au contraire que ce quelque chose que je suis quand j'écris n'aboutisse, par le fait que j'écris, à rien, sans aucune forme.' I am unable to recognize this as a general experience. Turning, not unnaturally, to the otherwise admirable essay on Rimbaud, it is a disappointment to find no greater clarity here. Blanchot will not have it that Rimbaud's silence was due to any incapacity to express his vision (and in this he is surely right), but the explanation which he prefers is in fact no explanation. 'C'est ainsi. Une heure nouvelle a sonné. Comme à la nuit succède le jour, le non-poète doit maintenant prendre la place du poète et le déposséder à jamais de ses trésors ineffables qu'il a prétendu posséder.' This is a statement, not an explanation, and though it is factually true of Rimbaud, everyone knows that Rimbaud is an astonishing and bewildering *exception*. And because this need for silence is neither explained nor adequately proved to exist, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that the theory is based rather on a philosophical *a priori* than on any empirical discovery. The philosophy of existentialism, to which Blanchot at least partially subscribes, would seem to demand the maximum number of human contradictions (as if there are not more than enough without forcing new ones). This is Mr. Ayer's field, and I have no qualification whatever for intruding on it. Yet it is impossible to avoid this 'philosophie de l'absurde', so conscious of it is M. Blanchot in many of his essays.

The last thing I would wish to do is to elevate a personal failure to understand into an accusation of obscurity. It were better, once again, to rely largely on quotations from the writer himself. For

instance it is reassuring to read the last sentence of this introductory essay. 'Le chef-d'œuvre inconnu laisse toujours voir dans un coin le bout d'un pied charmant, et ce pied délicieux empêche l'œuvre d'être achevée....' If the motive for silence is no more than the haunting sense of inadequacy, then it is intelligible and recognizable enough. But far more has been suggested than this, and more would indeed be necessary if the writer's internal conflict were to be as savage as Blanchot claims.

Leaving the introduction we are confronted with essays on Kierkegaard, Meister Eckhard, Blake, Indian philosophy, Proust and Rilke. Kierkegaard, of course, is the acknowledged pioneer of existentialism, and Blanchot quotes liberally from his journal. No quotation, I think could be more typical than this: 'L'imperfection de tout ce qui est humain, c'est que le désir n'atteint jamais son objet qu'à travers son contraire'. It is a stimulating aphorism of the kind which Valéry throws off so lightly. It is, in fact, *poetically* true, but not literally true. It instantly corresponds to a recognizable fact, but not to a universal fact. Now surely the gravest fault of all dogmatic religion is to confuse poetic truth with literal truth, and it is just this confusion which seems to lie at the root of the existentialist theory. No concrete applications are given of the statement, and even if they were, it would still remain to be proved that it is *universally* applicable.

In a later article on Albert Camus' essay, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Blanchot brilliantly illustrates one of the impasses to which a literal application of this philosophy must tend. 'Tantôt du fait qu'il y a de l'impossible dans l'univers "les philosophies existentielles" tiennent ce résultat qu'il faut glorifier l'exception, imposer silence à la raison qui est la règle, et la sauver en lui faisant prendre conscience de son échec. Tantôt elles se réclament de l'aptitude de la raison à apercevoir la diversité déraisonnable du monde et elles construisent un nouveau mode d'intelligibilité où le non-sens devient une simple catégorie de la pensée. Dans les deux cas on a éludé l'absurde.' But elsewhere Blanchot has unconsciously stated an even more crushing contradiction: '...le langage est ce qui existe en soi-même comme ensemble de sons, de cadences, de nombres et, à ce titre, par l'enchaînement des forces qu'il figure, il se révèle comme fondement des choses et de la réalité humaine.' This is virtually to deny the existentialist any right to the field of creative literature since he may not

believe in any discoverable 'fondement des choses' or 'réalité humaine'. So that whenever Blanchot approves the notion that all human contradictions are by their nature incapable of resolution, then, since literature is itself a resolution, he puts himself outside the bounds of written expression.

But fortunately, as I think, if only for the discreditable sake of my own understanding, Blanchot makes only a scattered, desultory attempt to apply the theory of his introductory essay to the rest of the book. It is rather the brilliant incidentals of that essay which remain in the mind, and it is their spirit which increasingly pervades the rest. 'Un écrivain qui écrit "Je suis seul" ... peut se juger assez comique... de prendre conscience de sa solitude en s'adressant à un lecteur et par des moyens qui empêchent l'homme d'être seul.' Here indeed is a truly Valérien statement, as admirably classical as the general tone of the essay is dauntingly romantic.

Even in the early essays where philosophical or mystical conflicts are brilliantly illustrated, the taint of unwarranted dogmatism is rarely visible. That conflict is at the root of nearly all creative art would be widely admitted, and a new perception of this is the undoubted benefit which Blanchot has derived from his flirtation with existentialism. Nor does he often appear to deny that conflict can be resolved in the act of creation. Indeed, when in his study of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, he invokes Sade, Melville, Dostoievsky, Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Malraux and Faulkner as creators of 'miroirs de l'absurde', then indeed the alarming word seems to have a familiar and more commonplace meaning. It is true that these writers are notably aware of conflict and notably thrive on it. But if the list were to support the thesis of insolubility, then at least Malraux, Dostoievsky, Proust and Joyce would have to be left out.

It is striking that the lurking obligations of the theory are more and more discarded as the essays succeed each other. Blanchot emerges as a critic of quite outstanding subtlety and penetration, fresh and original in his outlook but catholic in his appreciation. For Blanchot no less than for Valéry literature has all the essential qualities of a religion. I have never seen a clearer statement than this of the absolute dispensability of other religious belief to the true writer: 'Comment la poésie, si l'on voit en elle le coup de force suprême de l'âme, pourrait-elle accepter de s'appuyer sur une certitude religieuse préétablie? Elle exclut tout accord préalable

avec une forme spirituelle déjà exprimée. Elle ne sort que d'elle-même.'

There is little space here to do justice to a book in which new and illuminating judgements appear on nearly every page. But since the novel has been so severely attacked in France, Blanchot's treatment of it is of unusual interest. Few critics have made a harsher or more just attack on the past practice of novelists, but few have seen in the novel such noble possibilities. It is significant that his first essay in the section *Digressions sur le Roman* should be entitled *Mallarmé et l'Art du Roman*. No poet, I suppose, could more effectively reveal the novelist's most constant vices—pedestrianism, slovenliness and a mean ambition. Blanchot's thesis is approximately this; that the novel, never possessing the internal artistic discipline of poetry, has invented the spurious and vulgar discipline of 'truth to life'. Lautréamont has given one example of a 'sorte de livre pur, de roman idéal', and it is just some such purification and elevation of the novel which is its necessary salvation. Most urgently needed is 'un gout mortel de la perfection'.

'Alors que le propre de l'œuvre véritable est de créer un monde où les êtres que nous sommes, et les faits qui nous composent atteignent une nécessité et même une fatalité que la vie ne leur donne généralement pas, on prétend que la nécessité du roman réaliste et psychologique vienne de sa fidélité à exprimer les petits hasards de l'existence.'

I know of no truer criticism than this, nor of any which offers a richer inspiration to the contemporary novelist.

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If it is only as a tailpiece to *Faux Pas* that I can find space to write of Camus and Queneau, it is certainly not because they deserve no more attention. Both are novelists of unusual interest. With Jean-Paul Sartre, Camus is the leader of the existentialist school, and its most fanatical exponent. Queneau, a former surrealist, belongs I think to no school, but French critics have discovered in him at least a parallel development of ideas.

*L'Etranger* is the story of a clerk in Algiers who attends his mother's funeral, has a love affair, kills an arab, is tried and condemned to death. The bareness of this précis is suitable enough, for the book is parched by a deliberate and oppressive aridity.



Although narrated in the first person, the hero does not until the end make a single introspective statement. That he is hot or cold, bored or pleased or tired is the most that he will tell us of his feelings. It is, indeed, the most that he feels, and it is this lack of 'normal' reactions (I use inverted commas only because the strong implication is that the word should be hypocritical) which makes him the hated stranger. He is condemned more because he refuses at his trial to express the right feelings about his mother's death than because he has committed murder. I find, as so often, that I agree with Blanchot in regretting the hero's sudden volubility at the end. His attacks on the priest and society are conventional enough: it was in his indifference rather than in his hostility that his strangeness lay. This is an interesting book, though not, as I understand it, any more existentialist than *L'Immoraliste* or *Maldoror* or many others which never claimed the title.

The hero of Queneau's *Pierrot mon Ami* has much in common with *L'Etranger*. But here the deliberate two-dimensional quality is relieved by a savage or fantastic humour. 'Il se tourna vers Pierrot avec l'impression extrêmement satisfaisante d'avoir écrasé un copain et de le laisser anéanti sur le terrain'. The little circus and menagerie employee is not unlike Michaux' *Monsieur Plume*, a victim who somehow makes a triumph of his own victimization. There is a journey across France with a lorry load of wild animals which is certainly something more than funny. If *l'absurde* could be taken in so literal a sense it is indeed a welcome and stimulating quality. Though a less ambitious novel than *L'Etranger* I find *Pierrot mon Ami* more lively and more fruitful. Once again it may be that the mere influence of a dogmatic philosophy is enlivening, while the pure doctrine proves indigestible.

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Thus the revolt against tradition which existentialism represents seems likely to have fruitful indirect results, but to be in its dogmatic purity too self-conscious as well as too intrinsically barren a movement to produce a new art. It would be hard, however, to find even the most indirect influence of Heidegger on Henri Michaux. Yet quite independently he has carried his own sense of the absurd to surprising and fascinating lengths. He is

certainly and consciously a literary rebel, and I do not believe that he can profitably be attached to any tradition. To speak of a tradition of free-booters is surely contradictory.

Because Michaux is, in the simplest sense, a shocking writer, it is peculiarly difficult to write of him. English critics are not accustomed to shocks: their first impulse when confronted by the unusual is to search for a reassuring comparison. If none can be found, no label be attached, resentment too easily turns to suspicion of the writer's sincerity. But with Michaux this suspicion would be unthinkable: whether one appreciates him or not, it is impossible to doubt his sincerity. I find that my own first reaction—one of pure bewilderment—is widely shared by English readers. But after reading nearly all Michaux' published books I have felt so strong an appreciation, so constant and constantly renewed a satisfaction that some critical justification seems necessary.

Of Michaux as a poet I am little qualified to write (no doubt Mr. Spender will have done him full justice), but the distinction between his poetry and his prose is difficult to make. Just as there is a prosaic quality in his poetry, a poetic intensity suffuses all his prose. It is difficult, for example, to define this:

### LE GRAND COMBAT

Il l'emparouille et l'endosque contre terre;  
Il le rague et le roupète jusqu'à son drôle;  
Il le pratèle et le libucque et lui baruffle les ouillais;  
Il le tocarde et le marmine,  
Le manage rape à ri et ripe à ra  
Enfin il l'écorcobalisse.

L'autre hésite, s'espudrine, se défaisse, se torse et se ruine  
C'en sera bientôt fini de lui;  
Il se reprise et s'emmargine... mais en vain  
Le cerceau tombe qui a tant roulé.  
Abrah! Abrah! Abrah!  
Le pied a failli!  
Le bras a cassé!  
Le sang a coulé!  
Fouille, fouille, fouille,  
Dans la marmite de son ventre est un grand secret.

Mégères alentour qui pleurez dans vous mouchoirs;  
On s'étonne, on s'étonne, on s'étonne  
Et on vous regarde  
On cherche aussi, nous autres, le Grand Secret.

It is a poem, although many of Michaux' prose fragments closely resemble it. But I have quoted it for a different reason. Such nonsense poetry (though it is hardly purer nonsense than many of the passages in which there are no invented words) is rare, but it provides a key to a great deal of Michaux' work. It is significant that while the poem begins in a language of almost pure nonsense, it ends in ordinary French. The effect is to make normal and invented words almost indistinguishable. The thrice-repeated 'On s'étonne' seems to have as little, or as much, sense as words like 'emparouille' and 'endosque'. So that the poem of invented words would seem to be a device for draining normal words of their sense, and possibly substituting a new one. It is this escape from sense which Michaux aims at in a great deal of his writing.

Since much modern literature appears to have the same goal, and since Michaux' intention and method are really quite different from anybody else's, it is important to make the distinction clear. Surrealism, for example, is not nonsense at all: its ambition is to achieve a profounder sense, a sense underlying but not contradictory to the sensible world. Dada, on the other hand, is polemical nonsense, and unlike Michaux' work, has no internal laws or consistency. Existentialism is also polemical, and if it should lead to nonsense writing, the nonsense will be of a rigid and didactic kind. Nor does the learned philology of Joyce provide the least similarity.

Michaux' purest nonsense is to be found in *Au Pays de la Magie* and *Voyage en Grand Garabagne*, where it takes the form of inventing, not words but worlds. I think the initial difficulty in understanding these books comes simply from our deeply ingrained habit of searching for a hidden meaning (satirical, parabolic or psychological). As Gide has pointed out, we think first of Swift and Samuel Butler, with the result that our first reading is likely to be exhausting and frustrating. For Michaux is as far from these moralists as it is possible to be. He is not castigating or mocking at the real world, nor, like the *Utopists*,

is he exhorting us to improve it. He is simply disregarding it. It would be better (though even this is gravely misleading) to think of Lear. Maurice Blanchot, whose short essay on Michaux is more penetrating than Gide's lecture, writes: 'Dans ses ouvrages les plus significatifs, nous nous trouvons en présence d'une volonté complète de dépaysement, d'une invention qui ne justifie aucune comparaison, aucune arrière-pensée d'intelligibilité. L'auteur visite des peuples étranges, dont il décrit avec précision les mœurs, la flore, la faune, et leur étrangeté est absolument gratuite.' It will be seen that Lear provides no more than a straw for anyone in danger of drowning here. It is true that Lear invents fauna and flora, but the emotions of his creatures are entirely human. The Dong and the Pobble are unfortunates, with normal reactions to their misfortunes. Rather I find that these invented worlds remind me of the strange patterns of culture which Ruth Benedict has discovered in remote tribes. Here, too, we are shocked by the failure to subscribe even to our most fundamental notions of sense and value.

A child would have far less difficulty in understanding Michaux than any adult—not because he is himself childlike (he dislikes children quite as much as Lear liked them), but because a child is less case-hardened by the arbitrary 'normal' world. Michaux' invented countries which with their quite unfamiliar patterns of behaviour and emotion would be no less plausible to a young child than the implausible adult world around him.

'Marcher sur les deux rives d'une rivière est un exercice pénible. Assez souvent on voit ainsi un homme (étudiant en magie) remonter une fleuve, marchant sur l'une et l'autre rive à la fois: fort préoccupé, il ne vous voit pas. Car ce qu'il réalise est délicat et ne souffre aucune distraction. Il se retrouverait bien vite, seul, sur une rive, et quelle honte alors!'

Many readers will wish the two banks to be parabolic: the moral? that one should not try to do two things at the same time. But any attempt to apply such an interpretation will lead to the barrenest folly. Subtler interpreters may think of Kafka, search for psychological symbolism, for some attempt to objectify the strange images of the unconscious. No doubt an intelligent psychologist could draw many interesting conclusions from Michaux' fantasies—but he could do as much from any other writer. Such an investigation has nothing to do with literary

criticism, which is concerned with a writer's conscious intention and conscious effect. There is no doubt whatever that it is far from Michaux' intention to make an objectified study of his unconscious.

If all this is admitted by Michaux' English reader, it may be that he will feel nothing but indignation. What is the point of this gratuitous nonsense? Surely nothing could be easier or more futile? But it is hard to express the point of nonsense in sensible terms. Possibly indignation may be one of the points, for if this reaction is analysed it is likely to reveal a strong discomfort, a significant resistance to these inhuman worlds. Forgetting how arbitrary is our own world, we resent the creation of an arbitrary new one. But for those who accept the magic country, pleasure, freedom and excitement are the rich reward.

As for this being easily done, I can imagine few things more difficult than to create strange new countries, to divorce them utterly from the familiar and experienced, to give them imaginative credibility and internal consistency.

*Au Pays de la Magie* and *Voyage en Grand Garabagne* are the purest Michaux, the nonsense of Michaux carried to its farthest strange extreme. But there are many gradations of sense between these books and, for example, *Un Barbare en Asie*, intelligible simply as a travel book and devastating attack on India and China. Even here there are disturbing interlocutions, perhaps the more disturbing for the relative familiarity of their setting, but nobody, I think, would find the book difficult to understand. The short, semi-anonymous *Tu Vas être Père* is a good example of an intermediary stage. Here we are in the 'normal' world of Paris and the Midi and air raids: the only abnormality comes from the monstrous behaviour of the narrator. The installation of his wife as close as possible to the much-bombed Renault works might remind one of *Fils de Personne* if the spirit and intention of Michaux were not so utterly unlike Montherlant's. The similar actions of Montherlant's hero was a moral gesture: in Michaux it is a pure *acte gratuit*. Indeed, this is a strongly Gidian book—both more familiar and less impressive than Michaux on his own ground.

Somewhere between this and the imaginary countries is the terrible world of Plume. It is here, and in the incidental prose fragments that Michaux' astonishing mad humour is most

vigorous. This humour is probably the simplest key to an understanding of Michaux, for nearly everything that he writes is touched with it. *Plume* can be read simply as a wild fantasy on the misfortunes of the humble little man, though the violent sadism of some passages should be a warning against any simplicity of approach.

The attempt to analyse so unusual a writer in a few pages was bound to fail. And yet I feel that any criticism, however long and however devoted, must seem like an effort to pin down, not perhaps a butterfly, but a cockchafer or a praying mantis. It is easier to describe the personal impact of Michaux. I think that liberation describes it best, for this is the debt which many will owe to him, long after attempts at critical analysis have been forgotten. Here the effervescent human spirit has burst another cistern wall and flowed into a new valley. I cannot believe that anyone will successfully follow him there. Like many original writers, Michaux is not only extremely infectious, but easily imitable in spurious terms. But that any other writer will be able to make himself a home on Michaux' *propriétés* seems to me most unlikely. His influence may be great, but it will be indirect. He has given an example of independent exploration for which many writers will be grateful.

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HENRI MICHAUX	<i>L'Espace du Dedans</i> <i>Au Pays de la Magie</i> <i>Voyage en Grande Garabagne</i> <i>Un Certain Plume</i> <i>Tu Vas être Père</i> <i>Un Barbare en Asie</i> <i>Mes Propriétés</i>

# CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of HORIZON

SIR,

Mr. Montgomery Belgion appoints himself the champion of Montherlant. Now that he has buffeted Mr. Philip Toynbee from the lists, André Gide and Francois Mauriac are no doubt trembling at the prospect of his redoubtable advance. For they may be said to have challenged Mr. Belgion:

“Désinvolture”; c’est bien le mot qui convient, et Montherlant l’emploie à merveille. Il excelle à bailler pour vertu (qui plus est: pour vertu rare) et “liberté d’esprit” ce qui, je le crains, n’est qu’égotisme désintéressement de la chose publique. Il cite avec complaisance un mot de Gourmont, et l’on sent bien que, lui de même, la guerre, “ne le gêne pas.”—*Pages de Journal*. 1939-1941. (Charlot.) p. 87.

‘Nous ne nous crevons pas les yeux; nous mesurons l’être humain d’un regard lucide; mais cette clairvoyance même nous met en garde contre la facilité du mépris: au delà d’une fausse élite et de tout ce qui grouille à la surface, elle nous aide à découvrir ceux qui ont choisi de s’immoler. Après tout, sur la scène demeurée vide, le prince du chiqué et de la boursofflure, M. de Montherlant presque seul exhibe son numéro.’—*Le Cahier Noir*. (Les Cahiers du Silence). p. 21.

Yours faithfully,

ANTHONY DE HOGHTON

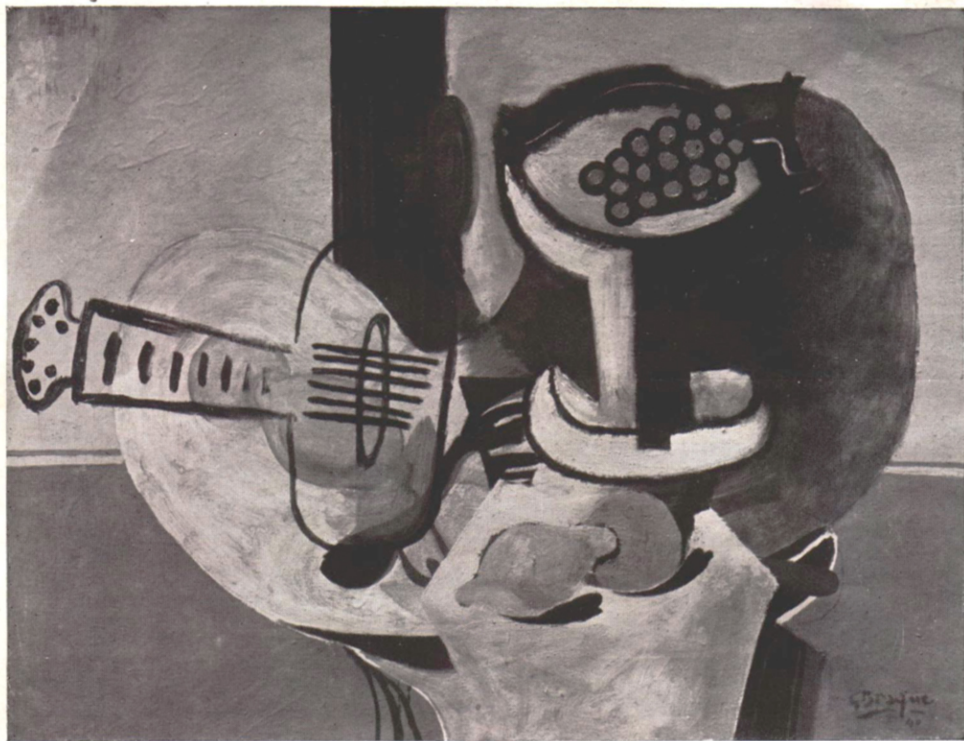




GEORGES BRAQUE : Le Pichet. 1941. *Galerie Louise Leiris*



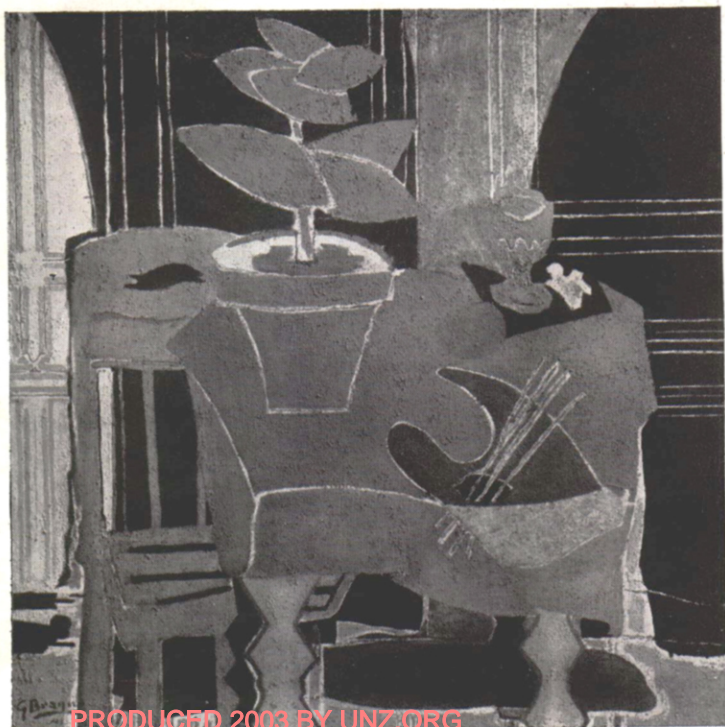
Nature morte au vase. 1943. *Galerie Louise Leiris*



Guitare et compotier. 1940. *Galerie Louise Leiris*



Portrait  
de femme.  
1942



Nature  
morte.  
1941





Les deux poissons

# p o l e m i c

will be a symposium of philosophy, psychology, æsthetics and sociology. The name **polemie** has been chosen because it suggests that we intend to encourage an exchange of opinions and ideas rather than to make propaganda for any compact system or predetermined outlook.

We assume that if language is finite, and if existence is infinite, every verbal proposition will be limited in its truth; and also since speech is inherited from the unscientific and magical past, its whole structure and vocabulary must be suspected to be less than precisely accurate as a means of explaining the universe. It follows that certainty, expressed in words, may always be false and reactionary.

Difference of opinion will therefore be understood as a natural reflection of the unlimited intricacy of the world we live in, and articles from more than one point of view, on a given subject, will be printed in each number. At the same time, the editorial policy will not be quite unprejudiced; it will assume that separately during the last fifty years there have been four revolutionary developments which are significant for the future of human thought and behaviour:

- 1 The discovery of the unconscious by Freud
- 2 The tendency of philosophy, as a subject, to develop into a science of verbal meaning (semantics, symbolism, logical positivism)
- 3 The trend in the arts away from representation towards expression and construction
- 4 The evolution of marxism as the Faith of tens of millions of people in Europe and Asia.

**polemie** will be a medium for discussing these developments in relation to the theoretical issues of the day. The first edition will be produced early this summer and will be edited by Humphrey Slater, and published by Rodney Phillips at Premier House, Dover Street, London, W.1, at two shillings and sixpence a copy. The contributors will include:

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C. H. WADDINGTON  
C. E. M. JOAD

A. J. AYER  
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